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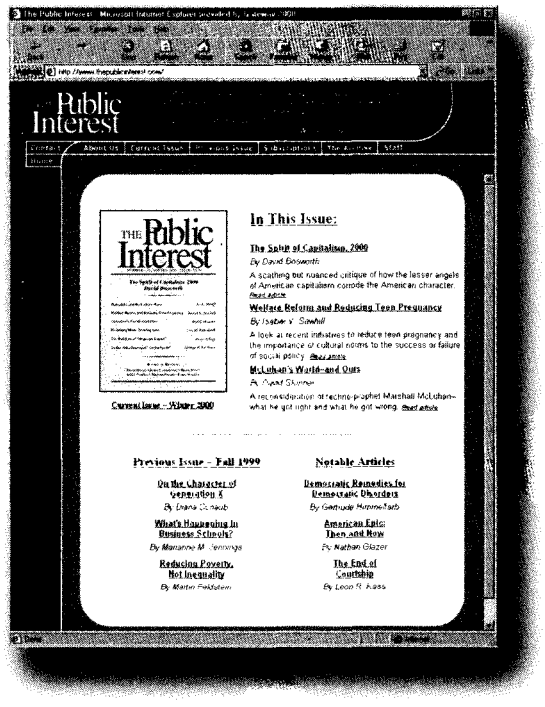

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When psychotherapy replaces religion

JAMES DAVISON HUNTER

WHEN it comes to the moral life of children, the vocabulary of the psychologist frames virtually all public discussion. For decades now, contributions from philosophers and theologians have been muted or nonexistent. Anthropologists and sociologists are likewise absent from the discussion. Historians have been busy documenting the major developments in this realm of social life, but their influence has been limited mainly to their guild. Rather, it is the psychologists, and in particular the developmental and educational psychologists, who have owned this field—in theory and in practice. All of the major players in the last half of the twentieth century have been psychologists. Erik Erikson, B. F. Skinner, Benjamin Spock, Havighurst, Carl Rodgers, Jean Piaget, Abraham Maslow, Rudolf Dreikurs, William Glasser, Lawrence Kohlberg, Louis Rath, Sidney Simon, Jane Loevinger,

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Daniel Levinson, Robert Selman, Maurice Elias—their assumptions, concepts, and paradigms have largely determined how all of us think about the moral lives of children, and, indeed, about moral life generally.

Why has psychology become so dominant—even, as I will show, infiltrating religion? The discipline itself has maintained over the years that, as the science of human motive and behavior, it comes closest to a rational understanding of that difficult and elusive phenomenon, human nature. As such, psychology is supposedly in a position to specify the conditions that permit or impede the full realization of a person's natural creativity, productivity, and well-being. Understanding the range and expression of moral sensibilities is central to this task insofar as it helps to specify what are, in fact, the constituting elements of "the good life."

There are also sociological reasons why psychology has emerged as *the* framework for understanding the moral life. With theology in all its forms discredited as a public language, psychology has offered a seemingly neutral way to understand and cultivate the best qualities of the human personality. It is "science" after all—and science, we are inclined to believe, is "objective." In the wake of the diffused Christian consensus dominant through the first half of the twentieth century, the psychological approaches to moral education seem so much more inclusive, less offensive, and less problematic on legal grounds. Indeed, its most vocal proponents have maintained that the framework psychology offers in understanding the moral life is, in fact, objective, and its application to education is universal.

From the beginning, the centerpiece of the psychological strategy of moral education has been the concept of "development." For some theorists, the concept of development is a fundamental axiom made explicit in carefully worded theoretical propositions. For others, it is just part of the accepted wisdom that forms a background of their thinking. While morality, in this perspective, is mainly defined in terms of a rational competence that gets expressed in increasingly sophisticated principles of moral reasoning, many psychologists would insist, too, that a person's emotions are inextricably linked to moral judgment.

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Indeed, since the 1960s, much of the research has given even greater prominence to the role of emotions in the development of moral understanding. It is our empathy with the plight of another that prompts ethical demands for justice; it is our uncertainty in the face of confusing events that prompts the effort of self-understanding; it is fear in the face of danger that invites the ideal of courage; it is our natural worry about threats to our livelihood or our well-being that prompts the virtue of prudence; and it is out of the experience of exhaustion or boredom that we learn to seek temperance.[1]

In the translation from theory to practical pedagogy, the dominant thrust of psychology has been *affective*. In the field, the centerpiece of this orientation has been the panoply of emotions surrounding one's own self-understanding and well-being—captured in the concept of "self-esteem." We are told that children who feel good about themselves tend to do well in school, are less likely to take drugs, will be sexually responsible, and will be more tolerant of others. Though the "self-esteem" concept lost some currency in the 1990s, other terms have arisen to take its place—for example, "emotional intelligence," or what its theorists call the EQ or "emotional quotient." After it was popularized by Daniel Goleman's 1995 best-seller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, hundreds of schools instituted programs based upon the idea. The enthusiasm for EQ is as high as it ever was for self-esteem programs. Says one advocate, "We believe it needs to be comprehensive, just like science and math.... Every child, every school, every year."

The psychological regime

The debates and discussion within this larger field of inquiry and pedagogy are complex, to be sure. The research that

[1] More recent research has focused upon the cognitive dimensions of emotion, particularly in the neurophysiological aspects of emotions (e.g., the biochemical reactions in the brain when one feels, say, anger or elation) and in the peculiar behavioral expressions of emotions (such as knitting one's brow when one is worried or breaking into a smile when one is happy). Indeed, they view emotions as a kind of cognitive process, a "hot cognition" as some call it. See Jerome Kagan's essay, "The Idea of Emotion in Human Development," in *Emotions, Cognitions and Behavior*, edited by Carroll E. Izard, Jerome Kagan, and Robert B. Zajonc (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

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forms the core of this general strategy is serious academic scholarship that has offered important insight into the psychology of moral understanding. Yet, as these theories find their way into curricula and other forms of practical pedagogy, the theoretical diversity rapidly disappears. Indeed, the real significance of this scholarship is found less in its details than in the way it diffuses into the larger culture as a guiding wisdom for thinking about moral life.

Such a diffusion is not surprising. The study of moral development was always meant to have a broader impact. The urgency of Dewey's educational vision—and those of Piaget and Kohlberg and their successors—was based on a straightforward logic: If we know what moral development is, then we will know what moral education ought to be. We can then proceed to devise programs that stimulate moral sensibility among children. It is in this way that the assumptions, concepts, and paradigms of secular psychology have largely shaped the way we all think about the moral lives of children.

The influence of psychology on our understanding of moral life has, in turn, had an impact on American culture. To whom do school systems turn when they need counseling for their students, or lawyers when they need "an expert" in court to explain the behavior of criminals, or journalists seeking opinions for a story on juvenile delinquency? We summon the psychologist, the child psychiatrist, the psychiatric social worker. The specialized knowledge of such individuals has become the common sense and working wisdom of parents, educators, and policy makers alike.

It is in the structure of this diffusion that we see this collective endeavor as a "regime." By regime I simply mean the complex network of institutions, ideas, ideals, and interests whose collective purpose is to propagate a general strategy of moral understanding and learning. Culturally, the regime goes far beyond whatever academic ideas are currently fashionable. Clearly, particular ideas and programs are packaged and presented in ever-changing ways. But the framing ideas, the mechanisms of diffusion, the institutional structures that support them, and the disparate group of elites that derive their livelihoods from them share common assumptions and interests. These ideas, mechanisms, structures, and elites

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do not change quickly. It is in this way that I speak of the prevailing moral education establishment as a regime.

Dominated as it is by perspectives diffused and diluted from professional psychology, this regime is overwhelmingly therapeutic and self-referencing; in character, its defining feature is the autonomous self. This regime's strategy of moral education now pervades *all* of the mainstream institutions that mediate moral understanding to children—schools, youth organizations, family counseling, and, most curiously, faith communities.

The religion of self-esteem

One would think that religious faith and religious communities would constitute a protective enclave against the influence of secular psychology. The reality, of course, is more complex. It was not so long ago that Protestant faith and institutions dominated moral instruction in American society. Today, faith-based cultures are fragmented and their institutions are marginalized.[2] The nation's diverse faith communities are neither part of the present moral education establishment nor a politically visible part of the neo-classical and communitarian backlash.

And yet while peripheral to the larger culture-forming institutions, they retain a prominent role in local communities and in the lives of many Americans. Of course, religious denominations and other para-ecclesiastical organizations support the local structures with curriculum material and the like. There is within these faith organizations considerable ambivalence in the mix of traditional biblical teaching and psychological assumptions, concepts, and methods. There is also considerable variation in the mixture—some emphasizing Scripture and tradition and others emphasizing the psychologi-

[2] In the case of Protestantism, Sunday-school enrollments in the United States from 1970 to 1986 dropped about a third (40.5 million to 26.6 million), a level that remained fairly stable through the 1990s. Consistent with this, Gallup polls have shown that the number of adults reporting no Sunday-school training during their childhood rose from 10 percent in 1970 to 27 percent in 1986. The number of willing, reliable, and trained volunteers has always been a challenge but, in this demographic context, it is a challenge that has only increased. Add to this a general drop off in denominational support for religious education and the cumulative evidence suggests that the institution is facing problems from which it may not recover.

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cal. That there is a blending of the two is inevitable.

Religious conservatives—especially Evangelicals—have been among the harshest critics of secular public education in the late twentieth century. Rank and file Evangelicals have consistently protested the teaching of evolution as well as the absence of prayer and Bible reading in schools. They have also emerged among the greatest supporters of old-fashioned character education. Though its leadership has not been very visible, conservative religious faith has clearly animated much of the traditionalist backlash to the moral education establishment, inspiring virtually the entire movement of abstinence-based sex education.

Conspicuous in this mix is James Dobson. As the head of the Evangelical family ministry, Focus on the Family, he has been at the forefront of opposition to nearly every cultural change since the late 1960s. Whether battling the National Education Association, the Sexuality Information and Educational Council of the United States, Planned Parenthood, or the liberal wing of the Democratic party, his opposition to progressive organizations and causes has been consistent, strident, energetic, and fairly effective. At the same time, as a family psychologist, he has dispensed advice to literally millions of parents and children. Dobson thus presents an instructive case of the mainstream Evangelical approach to moral education.

Dobson's 1989 book *Preparing for Adolescence*, perhaps his most significant effort to reach Evangelical adolescents with moral guidance, has sold over one and a half million copies and has had an extraordinary sway within the Evangelical subculture. The book is "designed to acquaint you with yourself ... to give you a better grasp of who you are and where you appear to be going." With the first chapter on self-esteem and a later one on emotions, *Preparing for Adolescence* depicts self-understanding and moral action as dependent upon the categories of contemporary psychology. The message is implicit but sustained throughout: Growing up requires ongoing introspection—about one's feelings of inferiority, sexual identity, problems, looks, indeed, every aspect of a teenager's emotional life.

As one would expect, the book offers a distinctively Chris-

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tian commentary on these challenges. Dobson speaks of the obligation to obey God's will as revealed in Scripture. He also speaks of God's values as distinct from "man's values," of the example of Christ and his courage, of the need for prayer before making decisions and the need for reading the Bible as a source of guidance. Thus the "appetite for sex"

> is something God created within you. I want to make this point very strongly. Sex is not dirty and it is not evil. Nothing that God ever created could be dirty. The desire for sex was God's idea—not ours. He placed this part of our nature into us; He created those chemicals (hormones) that make the opposite sex appealing to us. He did this so we would want to have a family of our own.... So sex is not a dirty thing at all; it's a wonderful, beautiful mechanism, no matter what you may have heard about it.
>
> However I must also tell you that God intends for us to control that desire for sexual intercourse. He has stated repeatedly in the Bible that we are to save our body for the person we will eventually marry, and that it is wrong to satisfy our appetite for sex with a boy or girl before we get married.

At the same time, the very first reason Dobson gives against premarital sex is the risk of venereal disease; and against marriage at a young age, the likelihood of divorce and becoming a parent before one is emotionally prepared. Likewise, the leading reasons for resisting the pressure of peers to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or take drugs are the consequences to health and emotional well-being.

In the lessons Dobson conveys to young people, the importance of a sustained introspective gaze, self-understanding, and well-being are established as the paramount moral categories. He enshrines self-esteem as the adolescent's most significant category in thinking about moral questions. Biblically based moral standards *are framed within* the language and concepts of popular psychology; not the other way around.

The end of sin

Dobson's approach is not uncommon within Evangelicalism. Kenneth Erickson's *Helping Your Children Feel Good About Themselves: A Guide to Building Self-Esteem in the Christian Family* also employs the language of popular psychology. Pub-

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lished in 1994, this sentimental book expresses an earnest concern for developing children. Here, too, self-esteem is made the cornerstone of a healthy childhood and even a healthy society. Quoting Dobson, Erickson bases his argument on the consequences of low self-esteem:

> In a real sense, the health of an entire society depends on the ease with which the individual members gain personal acceptance. Thus whenever the keys to self-esteem are seemingly out of reach for a large percentage of the people, as in twentieth-century America, then widespread 'mental illness,' neuroticism, hatred, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and social disorder will certainly occur.

As an Evangelical, Erickson grounds the idea of self-esteem in the love of God. "Teaching children the almost-unbelievable truth about God's love," he writes, "is one of the major tasks of parents." Beyond this important theological caveat and occasional Bible verse, however, there is little to distinguish his advice from that of secular family therapists. On the one hand, he emphasizes the building of self-esteem and self-confidence as ends in themselves, techniques of communication and problem solving, and the "inner child" (or "the stowaway child within"); on the other hand, he criticizes perfectionism and shame-based morality. While he writes of the importance of forgiveness, the problem of sin is all but absent.

In a way that is typical within the Evangelical subculture, Erickson provides parents a range of specific and practical therapeutic techniques for improving their relationships with their children and, ultimately, for enhancing their children's self-esteem. These include meeting frequently with other parents "to identify and share the major problems experienced in communicating effectively with their children"; holding "family inventory sessions," in which parents and children identify and record favorite things to do together; scheduling "family discussion sessions where each member is asked to think of, and share, two special qualities they like in each of the others"; recalling the number of times they affirmed or criticized each member of the family; estimating "the amount of one-on-one time you spend with each child per day" and comparing it to the actual amount of time spent with the child; selecting

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positive traits parents would like to pass on to their children and identifying a "trait-for-this-week" they will incorporate into their parenting practices; and "los[ing] no natural opportunity to serve as a family 'hug therapist' ... resolv[ing] that when you feel lonely or hurt, you will ask for a healing hug from your spouse or your children."

Much the same theme is found in Charles Gerber's 1996 book, *Christ-Centered Self-Esteem: Seeing Ourselves Through God's Eyes*. Here again, the terminology and presuppositions of secular psychology provide the framework for Christian self-help. In the view of this professional counselor, not only is "correct biblical self-esteem ... a vital ingredient to being successful ... it is the main ingredient." Unlike most of the Evangelical books of this genre, Gerber stays very close to biblical texts in his treatment of self-esteem; each point is backed up with verses from the Bible. The author justifies this by arguing that the Bible is "the ultimate source of self-esteem." Gerber's purpose, then, is to "show how important it is that a person build his or her esteem from God's side of the cross at Calvary and not their side of the cross." The key to biblically based self-esteem, he argues, is "Christ's esteem for us." By contrast, "low self-esteem is a doctrine of the devil; a cleverly disguised and disgusting lie taught by the devil for the purpose of killing, stealing and destroying mankind."

Typical of the formulae found in Evangelicalism, Gerber offers a "prescription to improve your self-esteem" that includes the recommendation that each person "spend time with God, reading the Bible," "remember your successes," "state positives about yourself," "do a weekly inventory of positive traits you see in yourself," "smile and maintain good eye contact," "become your best friend," and "stop wanting to be someone you are never going to be, and probably should not be."

Then there is Nell Mohney's *Don't Put a Period Where God Put a Comma: Self-Esteem for Christians*, a sweet book filled with inspiring stories whose purpose is to instruct Christians in the "abundant life" as portrayed in the gospel of John. For Mohney, the greatest obstacle to abundant life is negative self-image. "Many Christians have low self-esteem because they

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haven't yet accepted God's grace. Some even believe that because we are sinful and unworthy of God's grace, we should have low self-esteem." The antidote, of course, is a positive self-image. "We no longer have to live with feelings of loneliness, rejection, and unworthiness," Mohney writes. "Instead, as we receive God's love, we are able to perceive ourselves as 'new creations'—persons full of potential and worthy of respect. When we learn to love ourselves, we can be open to others, see them as persons of worth, and be instruments through whom God's love is made visible." She, too, punctuates her lessons with specific techniques "for developing high self-esteem," "reducing harmful stress," "developing better attitudes," "overcoming negative emotions," "becoming more optimistic," and "building self-confidence." Mastery over the self in this way is important because a positive self-image is central to the "Christian value system."

In these and other books there is a curious blending of cultural ideals and conceptual categories. This is not an unconscious parroting of contemporary moral psychology. Evangelicals seek, rather, to co-opt psychology for their own purposes, making therapeutic concepts subordinate to biblical wisdom. The premise is that psychology provides tools that are, by themselves, theologically and morally neutral but useful all the same when linked to the truths of Christian faith. Yet insofar as popular psychology provides the framing categories for this literature of popular guidance and admonition, it is the Christian worldview that undergoes a peculiar reworking. Despite an easy and contemporary coherence in all of these books, the cultural incongruities these advice books represent are, from a historical point of view, breathtaking.

The mainline churches

In part, because the claim to orthodoxy is not so aggressively adhered to, such incongruities are less obvious among mainline Protestants. But the ambivalent relationship of mainline Protestant communities to the therapeutic ethos is unmistakable.

The effort to link lay theological education and developmental psychology was already well established in the mainline Protestant churches by the mid 1960s. In a document

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produced by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in 1966, for example, leaders from 16 Protestant bodies outlined a strategy by which each member denomination could construct its own curriculum of religious education. Beyond better "use of the Bible in curriculum," they sought to better understand "the relationship of theological foundation and psychological insights in Christian nurture." Toward this end, their strategy was meant to integrate "learning theory" and "developments in contemporary education" in a Christian context. As a matter of practical theology, they explained that "the person's perception of his whole field of relationships, especially the way others relate to him and accept or reject him, greatly influences his capacity for self-acceptance. The self-acceptance, in turn becomes a key factor in his capacity to be outgoing in his relationships with others and with God, his Creator." Over the ensuing decades, the various mainline Protestant denominations have negotiated these insights in similar ways.

The United Church of Christ, for example, offers a pamphlet especially for youth in its "Looking Up" series. Entitled "Feeling Good About Yourself: Helping Young People Build Self-Esteem," the 1983 booklet argues that "self-esteem, self-worth, self-acceptance, self-image, or just feeling good about yourself" is the beginning of the moral life and remains forever central to it.

> Loving myself is at the heart of living, loving, and growing. Unless I love myself, it is harder for me to love others and to be loved by them. Life's problems are easier to figure out and face up to if I love myself. Growing into healthy maturity and being successful are helped by how much I value myself.

The message to young people is that the foundation of goodness, and especially altruism, is love of self: "We cannot give love if we don't have the love to give. And the love we have to give has its roots in our love of Self." The booklet even goes on to counsel its readers that to love oneself "is holy." Having made this clear, it then warns young people about the excesses of narcissism—where people are so fixed upon themselves that they give little thought or concern for anyone else. This is love of Self "gone wrong." "Persons who are selfish are so insecure that they need all the attention they can get, not only from others but also from themselves." The problem with these individuals is that

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they were improperly cared for when they were young. The answer for them, as for all young people, is to learn a proper form of self-love. It is to this end that readers are invited on a journey of self-discovery, a journey that never ends for the simple reason that the "self is always becoming, always growing, whether we're aware of it or not."

The importance of self-understanding and self-regard to both a healthy and moral life appears in the United Methodist literature as well. Of the many materials the denomination provides, one of the most interesting is *Devo'zine*, the devotional magazine designed to help Methodist teenagers to "develop a lifetime pattern of spending time with God and reflecting on what God is doing in your life." The message is familiar:

> Low self-esteem can keep us from achieving our goals, forming solid friendships, and seeing the good in others. It can even hinder our relationship with God. On the other hand, when we have healthy self-esteem, we realize that we are not perfect and are comfortable with that; are able to laugh at our mistakes rather than punish ourselves; can step out, share who we are, and try new things; view God as the loving, compassionate, and generous Creator of good things.

In helping them sort out their values, *Devo'zine* encourages readers to apply "critical thinking skills" to what they see on television: "Are the characters honest or dishonest? What are the consequences of their honesty? dishonesty? Are the characters especially selfish? Do they routinely show disrespect for one another? What are the results?" But embedded within this utilitarian logic is an appeal to transcendence: "What would Jesus think about the program? How would you feel if Jesus were watching it with you?" Moral choices are also framed within a psychology of emotional need. For example, "destructive choices meet a need of some kind. They do so in the wrong way, but they still meet a need. Bad choices may temporarily make us feel good about ourselves." Yet "to deal with sin, just saying no isn't enough. We need to fill our lives with Jesus, who is better and stronger than sin."

Sex and drugs

Because the reformed tradition in theology is known for its tendencies toward rational elucidation, it is not altogether

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surprising that the literature mainline Presbyterians offer their youth is far reaching. Here, too, whether on the moral life generally or on sexuality and drug use, the material reflects much the same pattern of ambivalence. The general orientation rejects "handing out absolutes," for these "can sometimes be a disservice to youth." Rather, one "must teach youth how to think, how to make faithful decisions, and how to live with the consequences of their choices." The stories and metaphors of biblical literature are used copiously throughout as a tool of moral instruction.

This church's pedagogy on sexuality, most fully developed in *God's Gift of Sexuality*, is unusual for its thoroughness and the fact that theology frames the discussion in its entirety—for all age groups. It offers, right up front, seven biblical and theological principles to guide an understanding of sexuality: "God created us and gave us the gift of our sexuality; God created us for life in community; our church is a community of love; our church is a community of responsibility; our church is a varied community; our church is a community of forgiveness; and God gives us responsibility for our own decisions." The theology is squarely in the liberal tradition and therefore inclines the denomination toward progressive views of abortion, homosexuality, and premarital sex. It also maintains a critical awareness of sexism, homophobia, and racism.

At the same time, the curriculum's authors are biased toward restraint—for example, "young people who are not married should not engage in sexual intercourse." In this framework, "young people ... learn a method of responsible decision making that can become a model for their lives." The model includes the typical techniques of hypothetical moral dilemmas, self-esteem exercises, and value-clarification activities. Here, too, the moral reasoning passed on to the young speaks of the importance to one's moral autonomy of feeling good about oneself. Yet consistent with its theological emphasis, the document states emphatically that one's sense of worth is enhanced by recognizing that God created us as one of his good creations. Indeed, overshadowing all is the view that "in our decision making, we are instructed by God's Word to us."

The Presbyterian drug-prevention curriculum, *Together: Growing Up Drug Free*, is thorough as well but more like other mainline Protestant and Evangelical literature in its em-

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phasis on psychological assumptions.[3] Thus, for example, while the manual openly recognizes that affective education focusing on self-esteem would be limited in its effectiveness, one of the fundamental factors in its alternative model (beyond teaching the consequences of drug use and interpersonal skills to resist peer pressure) is the "development of self-concept," which "includes helping children to discover and believe in their own competence, responsibility, and personal worth."

Therapeutic assumptions concerned with basic biological, psychological, social, and spiritual needs frame the argument, but the starting point is emotional well-being through self-understanding. Repeated to all age groups, in age-appropriate language, are four lessons on the nature of feelings: "feelings are real," "as real as things we can see or touch"; "feelings are not right or wrong," they "merely are"; "doing good feels good"; and "feelings change." The objective in these lessons is to change feelings through actions. If you are upset but respond in a way that is good, "your upset feeling will change into a good feeling," but "if you feel upset and do something you know is wrong, your resulting feeling may be different, but it will still be an upset feeling." Emotional self-understanding is not only the starting point but is also one of the threads that ties all lessons together, whether it is in dealing with peer pressure, the consequences of drug use itself, or the development of refusal skills. Stories from the Bible provide a point of reference, as do affirmations of God's love and strength, but the moral imagination is framed more by the categories of psychology than either Scripture or theology.

Judaism and Catholicism

The story becomes much more complex when considering the Catholic and Jewish approach to moral education. Without

[3] For younger adolescents, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offers the drug-education curriculum, "Just Say Yes!" Here, too, biblical guidance is woven together with the moral concerns of emotional and physical well-being. Straight off, young people are presented with 31 "price tags" of drug abuse, only one of which bears on the spiritual consequences. The rest emphasize cancer and other serious physical illnesses along with suicidal depression, embarrassment, and other emotional and psychological problems. Session two is on self-esteem. Session three focuses upon "personal power" to make tough autonomous decisions. The final session addresses "freedom"—mainly from bad habits but also freedom to choose positive goals.

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elaborating too much, it is worth noting that within these traditions, the moral education curricula have kept remarkably free of the influence of secular therapeutic strategies—or at least the influence is not so obvious. A number of factors may explain this. For one, both Catholicism and Judaism have historically sought to survive as minority faiths in a Protestant-dominated culture. These faiths also possess an identity rooted in ritual and tradition as well as a more deeply embedded historical self-understanding than Protestantism. But in practice, they too are not untouched by psychology.

The story is also made more complex within the lives of particular churches, parishes, and synagogues. Here such distinctions tend to flatten out to the kind of utilitarian formulae advocated through the dominant regime. For example, when asked how she would deal with a student who stole something from a classmate, the principal of a Catholic school in San Antonio said, "First, I'd ask them why they did it. I'd ask them about how it makes them feel, and how would they like it if somebody did that to them?" But if they felt okay about it? "I'd say, 'You know, you can't get away with it all of your life. It just doesn't work that way.'" Would she ever use the language of the Catholic faith to deal with these matters? After all, the setting was a Catholic school sponsored by the Catholic Church in the very Catholic city of San Antonio, Texas. To this, she answered quite matter of factly,

> Oh, no, that kind of language would probably not relate to them anyway. When I was growing up I personally might of responded to someone if they said, "hey, this is a sin." Today, though, I don't think that young people would respond to that. The most you could say to them is that, "this is not allowed."

A youth minister in a large Presbyterian church in Chicago made much the same admission. When asked—"Do you ever invoke the name or the example of Christ" with your work with kids on moral issues?—he said he did not. "Sometimes I think I should, but I find it artificial. For these kids, the symbols [of the faith] don't mean anything."

And for a rabbi in charge of religious education in one of New York City's largest Reform synagogues, are the young people he works with ever exposed to theological concepts like "sin" to help make sense of various ethical issues?

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> Sin isn't one of our issues. My guess is that in twelve years of religious school our kids will never hear the word. It's not a Jewish concern. It doesn't exist by us, for better or for worse.

As to the moral ideal of well-being, it is ubiquitous in youth ministry. The concept of self-esteem, in particular, is never far from the articulated objectives of such work, though it is not embraced without reservation. "Yes," said the Presbyterian youth minister,

> self-esteem is touted in youth ministry everywhere. It has become our standard. Yet what does self-esteem have to do with Christianity? Jonathan Edwards didn't have a damn thing to do with it. Isn't the denial of self at the heart of Christian faith? To me it can kind of degenerate into solipsism, self worship, so to me it's somewhat superficial."

Nevertheless, he continues to see self-esteem as a worthy aim.

The principal of the Catholic school in San Antonio also embraced the ideal of self-esteem but, in the same breath, interpreted it in the language of her faith. "Self-esteem is very much a basic teaching of the Catholic Church: you are created good and the Holy Spirit has gifted you and empowered you." The director of education at the synagogue in Manhattan affirmed it as well but framed it in communal terms. "I do want them to understand what a healthy Jewish identity is," he said, "so we have some very deliberate units that are called 'Proud and Jewish' which unquestionably builds up their self-esteem as young Jewish people."

The ambivalence of faith communities toward moral education could not be more clear. Many faith communities are determined to ground moral education in biblical literature and theological tradition; at the same time, they embrace the language and assumptions of contemporary psychology. Because Evangelicals are among the most self-conscious about the preservation of their orthodoxy, it is a bit ironic that they are among the least self-conscious about their embrace of therapeutic categories and ideals. Whatever else may be lost in this bargain, such syncretism does provide a contemporary diction that is both relevant to the young and easy for them to grasp. However, the fact that Evangelical Protestantism, despite its public posturing to the contrary, is comfortable with

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a therapeutic understanding of morality and moral development suggests that its resistance to the dominant culture may, in fact, be little resistance at all.

Triumph of the therapeutic

The problem is not subjectivity, for moral life has always required a deep and rich subjective engagement. But subjectivity in our day has given way to *subjectivism,* where the experiences, interests, and sentiments of the autonomous individual are enshrined as the standards defining the height, length, and breadth of moral hope and possibility. That this cultural transformation has taken place is rarely disputed anymore. What is particularly noteworthy is that the moral education establishments have, in various and often unintended ways, assisted and even celebrated this transformation in its work with children. The old Protestant establishment offers no real protest.

And so whether or not the pedagogies provide specific training in a range of desired behaviors, the implicit lessons of contemporary moral education speak powerfully to the moral imagination. Here, the self—its appetites, preferences, and interests—is at center stage, without serious rival or competition. *Thus, while nearly all moral educators disparage the subjectivism and individualism of our time, none of the alternatives presented are able to transcend or escape them.*

The purpose of moral education is to change people for the better and, in so doing, to improve the quality of life in society. The difficulty is that moral education, as it is presently configured and institutionalized, is utterly captive to the society in which it exists. It embodies too well the psychological assumptions that have brought the social order to its present place and that continue to maintain it. It is, in so many respects, a reflection of the moral order it seeks to transcend and then transform. In this regard, moral education, even in its diversity and its apparent oppositions, is more a story about the legitimation of American culture than it is about its transformation. This continues patterns well-established in history. In every context, in every generation in America, the evolving substance of moral education has reflected the central assumptions and ideals of the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. Our present moment is no different.

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The twilight of liberal welfare reform

LAWRENCE M. MEAD

THIRTY years ago, welfare reform was a liberal issue. In the 1960s and 1970s, government planners proposed that cash welfare benefits be raised and extended to the entire low-income population. But those proposals were rejected, and since the 1970s, the welfare debate has turned sharply rightward: The goal today is more to reduce dependency than to relieve poverty. The most recent welfare reform, enacted by the Republican Congress in 1996, was very conservative. Partly due to it, the number of families on cash aid has fallen by half in the last five years.

But left-of-center social planning is not entirely dead. The most important liberal reform experiment since the 1970s recently wound up in Milwaukee. The New Hope Project attempted to provide poor adults with the means to escape poverty wholesale. Eligibility extended to everyone 18 or over and willing to work who had incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line. That included many two-parent families and single persons, not all of them strictly poor, as

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well as the much needier female-headed families traditionally covered by welfare. To all these adults, New Hope promised a job (either in the private sector or, if necessary, a community service job, or CSJ), a wage sufficient to bring the family at least to the poverty line, plus subsidized child and health care. No established antipoverty program ever offered a package this generous. But to get any of it, participants had to work an average of at least 30 hours a week.

New Hope tested this plan in two poor neighborhoods in Milwaukee, one mainly black and the other heavily Hispanic. The benefits were offered to 678 clients, whose outcomes were then compared to those for an equivalent control group without the benefits. The program ran from 1994 to 1998, with each client guaranteed the benefits for three years.

When President Clinton proposed his own welfare plan in 1994, his mantra was, "If you work, you shouldn't be poor." He proposed that adults on welfare be required to work within two years, but they were guaranteed government jobs if they could not find their own. The plan was overtaken by the tougher Republican reform of 1996, which time-limits aid and guarantees no jobs. So New Hope became the chief test of the Clinton idea. If the clients were willing and able to work 30 hours a week, it promised, they would indeed escape poverty. That "if," as events proved, turned out to be the main problem. The program's achievements were real, but they lay in another direction.

The barriers theory

The thinking behind New Hope was typical of today's liberals, who seldom argue anymore for an egalitarian society and rarely attack capitalism, at least not openly. Rather, they claim that equal opportunity, which most all Americans support, has been denied to the poor (or minorities or women) by invidious "social barriers," especially racism and sexism. The Left's radicalism lies not in its utopian projects, which it has abandoned, but in its picture of current society as much more oppressive than most people believe.

The idea for New Hope came from the Congress for a Working America (CFWA), a left-leaning community group dedicated to promoting employment and training for the poor.

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CFWA's theorist was David Riemer, a lawyer with a long involvement in liberal causes and currently Director of Administration to Mayor John Norquist of Milwaukee. In *The Prisoners of Welfare*, published in 1988, Riemer contended that the main obstacles to overcoming poverty in America lay with the labor market, not with the poor themselves. The working-aged poor remained needy because they could not find jobs, or the jobs they did find paid below the poverty level. The answer was to guarantee them employment by funding community-service positions and to subsidize wages and benefits. That conviction shaped the New Hope "offer."

Riemer's argument reflected the experience of the 1970s and early 1980s, when repeated recessions and the contraction of factory employment made it seem to many liberals that jobs simply did not exist for a sizable part of the labor force, particularly the low-skilled. By the 1990s, however, jobs were plentiful, even for people with a high-school education or less. In October 1995, as New Hope began, over 32,000 full- and part-time jobs, at all skill levels, were estimated to be available in Milwaukee and surrounding counties, while the unemployed numbered only around 25,000. In the years 1994-98, when the project operated, the unemployment rate was 5 percent or less in Milwaukee County and below 4 percent most of the time in the urban area as a whole.

Few takers

As it happened, New Hope's chief problem was not the labor market but the reluctant response of those it intended to help. The Milwaukee neighborhoods the program targeted were indeed depressed. According to one survey, only 54 percent of the adults in them were employed. Planners estimated that a quarter of all adults in these areas, 12,000 total, might apply for New Hope. But only a handful did. It took the staff 17 months to get 1,362 eligible adults to come forward and express an interest; of these, half were offered the benefits and the other half put in the control group. Despite extensive mailings and outreach, only 20 percent of persons in the areas covered by New Hope said they had heard of the program.

Furthermore, even those who enrolled in New Hope made limited use of its benefits. While almost all of those who were

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eligible had past work experience, only 38 percent were employed when the program began. Over two years, 78 percent claimed the New Hope wage subsidy for at least one month, but only 48 percent claimed health benefits, and only 28 percent used New Hope child care. In a typical month, less than half the clients claimed any of these benefits.

One explanation for the low participation was that many clients had enough wages and benefits from their employers and thus did not need New Hope's assistance. But, on the other hand, those who claimed nothing were predominantly the most disadvantaged and the least employed—just those the program wanted most to reach. Or perhaps they could not find enough private employment to satisfy the 30-hour work requirement. Yet it was for that eventuality that New Hope provided its own jobs—an opportunity that, over two years, only 32 percent of clients took advantage of.

New Hope aimed at enticing the nonworking poor to work by making jobs more accessible and worthwhile to them. But actually, it was the 31 percent of clients who were already working full-time (30 hours or more) when the program began who used the benefits the most, not those working less than that. The working clients already met the 30-hour test, so they cashed in immediately on the subsidies for wages and child and health care. The nonworkers were remarkably slow to follow. This suggests that it is actually workers, not nonworkers, who face the greatest barriers to better employment. They encounter difficulties with pay and support services exactly because they are trying to move ahead. The nonworkers are not so much oppressed as detached.

The reasons for limited take-up are unclear, but no interpretation jibes with the original presumption of New Hope, which was that poor adults were motivated to work but faced difficult impediments. Most likely, the reasons for nonwork were largely personal. In New Hope's survey of its neighborhoods, only 49 percent of jobless adults said they were even available to work full-time. Some of these respondents cited as reasons for not working a lack of jobs, adequate pay, benefits, or child care—the problems addressed by New Hope. But the largest reason for not working—cited by 37 percent—was a lack of skills or experience. Fifteen percent said they

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had been disinclined to work. Among the nonworkers not available to work, personal reasons predominated—40 percent blamed health problems, 39 percent retirement, and 21 percent a need to stay home or care for children. These are not problems that "making work pay" can resolve.

Limited results

New Hope did achieve some worthwhile changes for its clients, but not of an order that would validate the program's rationale. For example, it raised the proportion of clients who worked at some time in two years by 6 percentage points. With the program, people worked 5.9 quarters in that period; without it, 5.4 quarters. There were no significant gains for earnings alone, but if earnings are combined with the wage subsidies paid by government and New Hope, then those in the program gained a significant $1,718 over the control group. New Hope, as expected, also increased use of health insurance and center-based child care. Unexpectedly, there were no significant reductions in the amounts paid to clients in cash welfare or Food Stamps.

Further analysis revealed that clients already working full-time when the program began gained little. Even though these clients used the benefits the most, their employment or earnings did not clearly improve. Indeed, those that were working more than 40 hours a week reduced their hours. Average wages fell by 46 cents an hour. It appears that the full-time workers felt free to cut back working hours and take worse jobs, or not look for better ones, now that they had New Hope to cover health and child care. (A similar effect has been found from income-guarantee programs in the past.) While this may have helped clients spend more time with their families, it contradicted New Hope's aim of raising work levels among the poor. Rather than use a new opportunity to get ahead further, these workers took a step backward.

The significant employment and earnings gains were entirely concentrated among those clients who were working less than full-time when the program began. They gained 7 percentage points in employment rate and $1,389 in earnings over two years. Still, in their second year, only 27 percent of these workers managed to escape poverty on the basis of earn-

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ings and wage subsidies. And even these gains were closely tied to their use of community-service jobs (CSJs). Such jobs provided them with the employment and wages that they did not get from the private sector. There is no clear way to separate the contribution of the CSJs from the influence of other elements of New Hope. But if employment and earnings from the CSJs are excluded, the program had no positive effects in these areas at all, even for clients not working full-time when the program began.

The role of the community jobs was not, as the program presumed, to make work possible for people for whom jobs were otherwise unavailable. Indeed, 62 percent of clients who left a CSJ in one quarter had a regular job in the next. Rather, community positions apparently helped people make the transition from nonworking to regular employment. Although CSJs paid only the minimum wage plus government and New Hope wage subsidies, some clients became all too comfortable in them. New Hope limited individuals to two CSJ slots of six months each, and staff had to prod some occupants to move on to the private sector.

In only one area did New Hope have a dramatic and unexpected effect: Children from New Hope families did markedly better in school than children not in the program. These effects were large, and most of them were for boys. According to teachers, boys gained sharply in academic and classroom skills and their behavior markedly improved. New Hope boys also in larger numbers aspired to go to college. Why New Hope had these effects is not clear. But it is the first experimental evidence that putting poor parents to work might not just reduce welfare dependency but be connected to other, noneconomic benefits to families and neighborhoods.

Misplaced hope

One might argue that Milwaukee's very good economy undermined New Hope's economic effects. In a recession, with higher unemployment, the special benefits would have made more of a difference. Also, New Hope's very broad eligibility meant that many of its clients were already working. A program specifically meant for the nonworking, such as welfare mothers, might have had more of an impact.

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Moreover, New Hope coincided with Wisconsin's overhaul of its welfare system, which included much tougher work requirements. The effects of this on New Hope are unclear. The new demands might have driven those in New Hope's control group (who did not receive its benefits) to work, since they now had no alternative, thus reducing the results shown by New Hope. But by the same token, single mothers eligible for both New Hope and welfare might have worked harder too, in order to access New Hope's benefits and escape the hassles of welfare. The end of entitlement welfare in effect tightened New Hope's work test. Women lost the option of declining New Hope's offer and remaining on welfare without work.

Although that offer was uniquely generous, its benefits made less of a difference than might be expected. The program was not alone in supplementing the salaries of struggling workers. Both the federal government and Wisconsin have wage subsidies for low-paid workers, and the state increased its subsidy during New Hope. Partly for this reason, the wage supplements that New Hope paid its workers to reach the poverty line turned out to be small. The payments, when made at all, averaged only $125.90 a month.

Nor were the other benefits offered by the program unavailable elsewhere. Milwaukee was already well served by social services, both public and private. As a result, families in New Hope might do little better than those outside the program. During the first two years of the program, for instance, 87 percent of New Hope clients had health insurance, but so did 74 percent in the control group. Forty-one percent of New Hope families had child-care assistance, but so did 27 percent of controls. Working families often got health coverage from their employers, and families leaving welfare could get both health and child care from the government, so they did not need it from New Hope. For all these reasons, the project's cost, although a substantial $15 million, was $3 million less than planned.

But if New Hope made little difference, then its original rationale was questionable. The truth is that work already paid for the vast majority of would-be workers in Milwaukee, even without New Hope. The private sector was far more adequate than New Hope assumed, and the need not met there was

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largely covered by existing social programs. There was no large unmet need that, if met, would suddenly liberate the poor to work and escape poverty. Of course, I do not mean to say that working one's way out of poverty is easy—but the benefits New Hope offered did not make it much easier. I also do not mean to say that there are no unmet social needs—but filling them had little to do with the nonworking poor going to work.

Ultimately, New Hope misjudged the psychology of the poor. Liberal social planners, like conservatives, often make what I call the "competence assumption"—the idea that the poor are willing and able to advance their own interest, if not society's. If that were true, prolonged poverty could only be caused by outside barriers, and removing such barriers would be the key to overcoming need. Liberals want to do that with more social programs; conservatives prefer the free market. Both assume that the poor have a level of drive that few in fact possess. If they had such energy, they would not be poor for very long in the first place.

In fact, the inner-city poor suffer from a culture of defeat. Adults there commonly feel so beaten down that they have great difficulty seizing new opportunities, even when they appear. New Hope did improve access to medical care and housing and generally improved its clients' financial condition. But they also suffer from clinical levels of depression. What is missing in the inner city is not so much economic opportunity as hope and belief, above all in oneself.

Institutional achievements

But New Hope was not without success. The program prefigured the paternalistic aid system that is emerging from the crucible of welfare reform. That system relies not on social reform but on reorganizing and supporting the lives of the poor themselves.

New Hope's excellence was first of all political. Although proposed by an organization that was well to the left of center, the project gained support from business and government. The Greater Milwaukee Committee, a business body, lined up funding from local corporations, while Washington and Madison, as well as both liberal and conservative foundations, also contributed. The New Hope board, although well-stocked with

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community representatives and even clients from the program, was chaired by the CEO of the Wisconsin Gas Company.

New Hope's founders thus reached out to conservatives. They hoped that their program would change America, but they made sure it was fundable and administrable. They ran a pilot program for 50 clients for three years in advance of the main program, to work out procedures. They enlisted experts to advise them and evaluators to assess the final results.

Most importantly, they refused just to give benefits away. The 30-hour work requirement sharply distinguished New Hope from the welfare-expansion schemes of the past. During the Great Society, liberals backed a "negative income tax." Recipients who went to work would lose only part of their welfare through benefit reductions; they would thus have an interest in working. But they got this subsidy regardless of how many hours they worked, and they did not have to work at all. Experience and research showed that this sort of incentive barely raised work levels among the poor. New Hope also phased down benefits gradually as earnings rose to preserve work incentives, but it added the 30-hour threshold—forcing clients to put in serious working time to get any benefits at all.

For their part, business and government were willing to support a public-policy experiment, even if it conflicted with their instincts. Conservatives in Wisconsin, led by Governor Tommy Thompson, are less antigovernment than elsewhere. They worry about taxes and the size of government, but mainly they want to use government to improve society. They see themselves as the heirs of the Progressives. This impressive capacity of the Left and Right to collaborate reflects the high-mindedness of Wisconsin's political culture.

Even more notable was the New Hope organization. With a staff of only 25, it administered a complex benefit structure for hundreds of clients. It also developed path-breaking procedures that turned the traditional logic of welfare upside down. Past welfare programs determined whether applicants for aid fell under some standard of need, then paid them a grant to make up the difference. The grant was adjusted only at intervals, and it was typically assumed that recipients were not employed. Indeed, if they were, the grant had to be ad-

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justed more often, which the welfare program had difficulty doing. Public assistance was presumed to be the basis for family income, with earnings from work at best a supplement that would cause some reduction in the grant.

In the work-based aid system that is emerging, however, the expectation is that clients "work first," and then get aid only if they remain needy. Now earnings are primary and welfare is the supplement. New Hope was the first program to achieve that end. At the close of each month, clients had to turn in wage stubs to indicate their earnings. The program calculated the government wage subsidies that they would receive, then added to this any New Hope supplement needed to reach the poverty line. New Hope also expected clients to help pay for their health and child care, like other workers, and these co-pays too were adjusted as earnings changed. Most important of all, administrators verified that clients had averaged the 30 hours a week needed to qualify for benefits.

The core of the New Hope organization was its case managers, each responsible for about 75 clients. These "project reps" introduced clients to the program, arranged their benefits, then adjusted them each month. In traditional welfare, clerks determine eligibility and benefits while higher-status case workers arrange services to move clients toward independence. New Hope's project reps performed both tasks in order to reduce welfare fraud and to serve their clients better. By calculating benefits, the project reps found out whether or not clients were working; by helping clients find work, they came to know much about the clients' lives, which deterred cheating.

The project reps' initial stance was to assist clients who came to them seeking benefits, but since take-up was low, they also sought the involvement of nonparticipating eligibles. That meant locating them, persuading them to work, helping them to meet the 30-hour work requirement, if necessary through a CSJ, and helping them to solve all the practical and family problems that might stop them from working. The staff were coaches and hand-holders, but they also believed in "work first." They told clients that it was best for them to take available jobs now, not hold out for better ones. The emphasis was on discharging expectations *in order* to get benefits. To

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get ahead, poor adults need help, but many also need structure—someone watching over them to be sure that they "do the right thing." New Hope fused the help with the hassle more seamlessly than any program has done.

Clients responded very positively. Many said that the encouragement they received from the project reps was the best thing about New Hope. They contrasted the skill and resourcefulness of their project reps with the deficiencies of the Milwaukee welfare department's case managers. Due to New Hope, families with children received markedly more practical assistance, counseling, and emotional support than families not in the program. The New Hope experiment clearly suggests that case managers with powers both to help and obligate the dependent poor might begin to reverse the defeatism that is the strongest deterrent to their advancement.

In the shadow of W-2

New Hope was a side show to the great drama going on in welfare. In a reform extending back to the mid 1980s, Wisconsin transformed its welfare system more radically than any other state. It gradually instituted work requirements of uncommon stringency. Along with a good economy, these drove the welfare rolls down to around 10 percent of their level when the reform began—the most drastic fall in the nation.

Under the new system instituted in 1997, called Wisconsin Works, or W-2, recipients could get a wide range of services and grants, but in return they faced unambiguous demands to work, at one of several levels. The more employable received no cash but only support services while they looked for work. A few clients worked in private jobs subsidized by government. The less employable entered CSJs while the unemployable went into mandatory remediation programs. In some ways, W-2 was more radical than New Hope. Applicants were treated as individuals rather than families. Whereas New Hope's wage supplement varied with family size, W-2's benefits did not. The argument was that recipients should be paid a flat sum regardless of their dependents, just as regular workers are.

W-2 was more realistic than New Hope about the reasons for working-aged poverty. It covered only families with children, not single people. At the same time, it covered the

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currently unemployable, whereas New Hope gave nothing to people who could not work 30 hours. W-2 emphasized working hard in the current economy, not the inadequacy of the labor market. It demanded that eligibles put in 40 hours a week rather than 30 hours, making wage supplementation less necessary. It did not promise that workers would escape poverty. Benefits were time-limited, whereas in New Hope the financial subsidies were in principle open-ended (they ended only because the program was temporary).

On the other hand, W-2 shared with New Hope the demand for work in exchange for support. Both guaranteed work through CSJs, so that the work test could not be evaded. Both de-emphasized education and training for the poor in favor of work in available jobs. In return for work, both accepted that government should do much to help the poor escape poverty. W-2's cash benefits, currently $628 or $673 a month, are still among the highest in the country. W-2 also provided subsidized health and child care, not only to cash recipients or former recipients but to the entire low-wage working population up to 165 percent of the federal poverty line.

A child of Wisconsin's civic political culture, W-2 displays the same institutional excellence as New Hope. Reformers of both parties collaborated in creating W-2, and it was executed by the state's exemplary bureaucracy. (In Milwaukee, however, where the welfare department was judged subpar, control of W-2 was given to private agencies.) The implementation of the program, to be sure, was marred by considerable confusion, with many recipients losing benefits improperly. Its managers and staff were, on average, less gifted than New Hope's. But then, W-2 had to change a large existing welfare organization, which is a much tougher task than creating a small new one.

Above all, W-2, like New Hope, is paternalistic. Not only are benefits combined with demands, but an administrative system oversees clients' compliance. Likewise, case managers meet frequently with their clients, providing needed services and pushing people to go to work as soon as possible. As the caseload has fallen, W-2 has begun reaching out to troubled families that might need aid, just as New Hope had done to improve take-up.

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Now that a serious work demand is in place, the main challenge is no longer to minimize dependency. Rather, it is to be sure that all the nonworking take up the offer of help in return for work. The work test keeps the caseload down, allowing more to be spent on the remaining cases. The upshot is a new welfare state that is almost European in its generosity—but, due to the work test, much more demanding.

The true social challenge

New Hope and W-2 both dramatize the true challenge facing the welfare state today. It is no longer mainly to protect workers from the evils of capitalism. Rather, it is to make workers out of the chronic poor. In an affluent society, there is less need for a "safety net" than there once was. Unemployment is less threatening to the jobless, because they often have savings and can usually find other jobs quickly. The rapid fall of the welfare rolls has occurred with little apparent hardship, showing that even welfare recipients have more resources than is conventionally imagined. The chief task of the welfare state is then not economic but social. It is to ensure that the worst-off fulfill society's minimal expectations, chief among them working. Otherwise, they cannot claim the full promises of American citizenship.

But to enforce work, there must be a political consensus. The Right must accept that big government is here to stay: Paternalism is impossible without bureaucracy and support services. The Left has a tougher task: It must accept the end of the culture of entitlement. The poor must help themselves in return for support, not just receive aid on the basis of need. The refusal of many liberals to accept this is the chief obstacle welfare reform faces. New Hope was distinctive because it helped to legitimize serious work enforcement among liberals. That principle contributed in diffuse ways to the building of W-2 and to a more hopeful prospect for the entire nation. New Hope failed as social criticism but succeeded as statecraft.

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The cultural revolution in health care

RONALD W. DWORKIN

THERE comes a time in any industry when the principles that have long governed its activity and operation no longer apply. A change occurs in the minds of the people who deliver the service, and though they continue to go about their work in timely fashion, they grow doubtful and frustrated about the way things are moving. They carry on with less conviction; they grow ill-tempered; the office environment becomes a very uncomfortable one. In the same way, consumers grow nervous and dissatisfied. They complain to friends in their immediate circle, and the only thing that keeps them from acting on their dissatisfaction is that they do not know whom to blame. Though the industry in question does not actually come to a standstill, a feeling of confusion and general gloom permeates all activity associated with it.

The health-care system in the United States has reached this point. It is not tottering, but it is painfully evolving toward some new form. A secret warfare is going on right now

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between doctors, health professionals, hospitals, and insurance companies, with each blaming the other for its troubles. Consumers no longer know who is ultimately responsible for their medical care, and they are not sure what constitutes an entitlement and what represents a usurpation of their rights as patients. The very definitions of certain health-care commodities, like mental health, are now so unclear that neither professionals nor laypersons know what they encompass, which makes it very difficult for the economic experts and policy makers to distribute them.

Indeed, there is a certain blindness in looking at health care through economic models. Such models are designed to organize and distribute a product in a rational world. They are not meant to be seismographs that pick up tremors caused by the emergence of a new cultural order. What it means to be a doctor, what it means to be an insurance company, what it means to be a patient—these are all questions that had generally agreed upon answers a generation ago. But no longer. The health-policy expert, whose sole purpose for a generation has been to address problems of efficiency, economies of scale, and distribution, is ill-equipped to confront the revolution in health care that is now underway. Economic models are useful when everything in an industry is agreed upon and the only thing in flux is the amount and allocation of resources. But in health care today much more is in flux than just money. There are very basic issues—cultural, sociological, even spiritual—that need to be resolved before the economists can get back to the business of organizing and delivering.

A stable health-care system is like a giant honeycomb. Inside, sturdy walls give each sector of the industry protection and allow everyone to live together in order and peace. For over a generation, this is how the U.S. health-care system was structured. The doctors had their turf, the nurses had theirs, the insurance companies had theirs, the nursing homes had theirs, and so forth. Everyone working in health care knew his place. It was more than just a division of labor; it was an intangible feeling of mutual respect that gave each group a sense of security and identity.

A major cause of frustration and resentment in the U.S. health-care system is that the walls of the honeycomb are

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starting to break down. I have observed this phenomenon most closely in Maryland—the state in which I practice medicine. Nurses and other health professionals are trying to expand the scope of their practice into areas traditionally reserved for doctors. Doctors are invading the domain of hospitals by running surgery centers. Hospitals are trying to assume risk and become like insurance companies. And insurance companies are trying to make health-care decisions, the fundamental prerogative of doctors and nurses. Each group believes it must change to survive. The old roles are no longer sacrosanct while the new ones are still undefined.

The doctors

Doctors are the most bewildered of all, and their changing role signifies nothing less than the decline of medicine as a profession. In the traditional sense of the term, medicine was a *profession* because of the virtues associated with its practice. Medicine was about more than making money. Like soldiery and the clergy, it had a higher purpose, which imposed upon its practice certain ethical norms of behavior that were rigorously adhered to, in part because the profession enforced these norms but also because doctors truly believed in them. Doctors, for example, could have advertised a generation ago in order to boost their incomes, but most refused to do so because they thought it dishonorable. The medical profession maintained certain standards of right and wrong; financial remuneration was only of secondary concern.

What made medicine a profession in the modern sense of the term was the autonomy physicians enjoyed in their everyday work. Physicians were not "organization men." They did not have to be backslappers or joke-tellers or handshakers; they did not have to get along with the boss or be shrewdly political. Their healing skill was enough to attract patients and earn a comfortable living. Their job in life was largely to supervise themselves. They answered to no one but their patients.

But doctors no longer have the sense that their profession constitutes a special brotherhood devoted to a higher purpose. For many doctors, what they do is a job like any other, a notion that is reinforced when insurance executives, as well as

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politicians and policy makers, call doctors "providers," lumping them together with nurses, secretaries, maintenance people, and even the volunteers who run the gift shop at the hospital. Doctors now see themselves as mere cogs in the machine—just another set of "worker bees" in the industry hive. True, their job has compassion built into it, but this makes doctors no different than other "caring professionals," such as therapists, counselors, and social workers. Again, there is nothing distinctive about being a doctor. It is merely about providing a service to people in need, something that many people can lay claim to.

As a result, the issue of payment looms large. An elderly physician once told me, "We didn't make much money back in the old days, but it was better then." Doctors were rewarded not with the highest salaries but with more intangible pleasures. They occupied a lofty position in society; they were looked up to and admired; they were pillars of the community, respected by patients and administrators alike. Their happiness and contentment did not turn on hourly billings but, rather, on the gratitude of their patients.

Doctors' happiness today, however, does turn increasingly on such material things, and this puts pressure on the healthcare budget. Policy makers who try to transform medicine into just another business, partly to increase efficiency but also out of a subtle resentment toward the high status physicians enjoy relative to Ph.D.s, simply accelerate the process. Doctors, for example, are seriously considering forming unions—at the hospital where I work, some young physicians jokingly call themselves "proles"—and the idea has recently received endorsement from major physician organizations. Once this occurs, medicine will cease to be a profession and medical costs will go up. Doctors will become like plumbers, though perhaps better paid, and they will constantly be fighting over the dollar, just as other unions do.

This is what happens when the medical profession is shorn of its transcendent qualities—its mystique, its notion of duty, its code of honor—and made into a rational, economic enterprise. Years ago, physicians might have been satisfied with less income, since what they lacked in money was made up for in status. There was almost an ascetic nobility that went with

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being a doctor. But now that doctors get little more out of their work than a paycheck, the money is much more important to them and they increasingly try to make more of it.

The effort to boost income is intensified when the other intangibles that doctors once enjoyed, like professional autonomy, are undermined. Doctors complain that managed-care companies oversee too many of their clinical decisions and that they must please some faceless bureaucrat without a medical education before ordering a test. Yet few doctors think seriously about starting a practice independent of an HMO. They know that they have to join managed-care organizations to get patients.

For all practical purposes, doctors are being forced to become organization men. They must live with the constant fear of being removed from an HMO panel (a process called "deselection"). They must get along with their bosses and do their paperwork in timely fashion; otherwise, they will lose their practices. A new breed of physician actually desires to succeed in the fashion of the organization man. These doctors "upgrade" their social skills and emphasize their ability to supervise the work of others. They get MBAs and prepare for careers at the high management levels of HMOs or, better yet, as entrepreneurs running surgery centers or large networks of providers.

But most physicians simply resign themselves to what would be the medical equivalent of middle-management—taking care of patients on a fixed income and working for higher-ups. These doctors, calculating their salaries in terms of the hours they put in, prefer to work in shifts rather than staying up all night as the honor code once demanded of them. The result is a loss of continuity in medical care, as patients are passed from one doctor to another over a 24-hour period. The resulting damage to patients' health—the increased morbidity due to mistakes in communication between doctors—has yet to be calculated. But no matter. Such "corporate doctors" are bombarded on all sides by the notion that medicine is more a business than a calling. They feel pressure to keep costs down and are aware that a profit must be made if their HMO is to survive. And as more and more physicians become like organization men, the old professional ethic withers.

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The nurses and health professionals

Physicians are moving into new areas partly because their own turf is being threatened by nurses and other health professionals, including optometrists, nurse psychotherapists, midwives, nurse anesthetists, and physical therapists. In many states, nurses and other health-care professionals are allowed to see patients and prescribe therapy without consulting a physician. The supervisory link, when it does exist, is often just a formality. Managed care has encouraged this trend for obvious reasons: For a given task, non-M.D.s will work for less.

To a certain extent, physicians have only themselves to blame for this turn of events. For several decades, physicians have neglected the prescription power given to them by law as a source of income, preferring to receive most of their remuneration based upon the advanced scientific procedures they perform. The insurance code has come to be biased toward those specialties centered around a specific task: The surgeons have surgery, the gastroenterologists have endoscopy, the cardiologists have angioplasty, and so forth. Cognitive work, the kind performed by primary-care physicians or psychiatrists, is less rewarded.

Yet, by basing their income on the technical procedures they perform, doctors gave non-M.D.s a tremendous opening. For those procedures, especially when they are divorced from serious cognitive work, can easily be mastered by individuals without advanced medical education. This point was driven home when I was a resident in anesthesiology. I had successfully learned to intubate patients with a special instrument, and I was proud, but one day my professor handed me the necessary scope and said, "OK monkey, do your trick." Technical procedures, by themselves, require repetition to be mastered, not complex knowledge. Realizing this, non-M.D. personnel claim, often quite rightly, that they can perform the procedures just as well, and for less money.

This challenge from nurses and other health professionals would never have been possible, however, without the more far-reaching change in attitudes that prepared the way. Just as physicians once had a place in their own sphere, so too did health professionals; and while their rank was no doubt lower than that of doctors, they also followed a code of honor. Con-

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sider the case of nurses, who had their own uniforms and hats, and who, in the traditional ideal, embodied the virtues of compassion, duty, and service. Nurses even took a certain pride in the harsh difficulties they endured while caring for the sick; and doctors honored and respected nurses for their virtues, admiring their selflessness.

Perhaps the mystique surrounding nurses had a sexual component as well since, in the past, doctors were generally men and nurses generally women. Nurses were like priestesses or perfect human beings, to be respected and honored, though at the same time, to be dreamt of and offered a kind of protective devotion. Thus did the mission of nursing come to be bounded on all sides by cultural and social prejudices.

But in a rational world, where health care is simply an economic enterprise, the mystery that shrouds the doctor-nurse relationship disappears. Perhaps this change was inevitable, at least in regard to the sexual component: Almost half the medical students in the United States are now women and nursing is increasingly a popular profession among men. But the other component of the old medical ethic—the peculiar rules that governed the behavior and activity of doctors and nurses—did not have to disappear. Yet it has. Many health professionals no longer see themselves as having a special identity, and the service they provide is reduced in their minds to just another form of material labor. The only issue for such modern health-care workers is who labors for whom.

The mystique of caring is gone. And just as it seemed ridiculous toward the end of the feudal era for only aristocrats to be able to wear swords at their sides, so too in the era of rational economy does it seem silly for only doctors to have a monopoly on certain physical tasks. Since it is all just labor now—pushing buttons and focusing lasers—nurses and other health professionals do not see why they should be prevented from performing those tasks.

The roots of health professionals' resentment toward physicians are found here. Health professionals look at doctors as their masters, and while they like being paid by the masters, they are not sure why they should not to be masters themselves. In an egalitarian age such as ours, authority is respected only if it is based on merit. So when non-M.D. health-

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care professionals see that much of what doctors do they could do too, they resent doctors' superior standing.

Doctors sense this resentment and try to appease it by befriending their co-professionals. The relationships between doctors and other health professionals are much more relaxed and informal than they were even a generation ago. Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals often address each other on a first name basis and socialize together—something that was once unheard of. But as a result, doctors find it even more painful to bark orders when it is necessary to do so. For they now find themselves wielding authority over their friends, and the resentment on the part of their co-professionals seethes even more.

The consequences for health policy of such cultural changes are serious and not well understood. Economists think they can cut health-care costs by encouraging non-M.D. professionals to take over more of the traditional duties of physicians. They are mistaken. The pressure for greater reimbursement will only intensify as non-M.D. professionals working in HMOs perform the same tasks as doctors—the only difference being that doctors get paid more and have private indemnity insurance. Eventually the anomaly will be too glaring to hide, and there will be demands for equal pay.

Health professionals have taken a piecemeal approach to gaining the right to perform procedures once only done by doctors. By using an incremental approach, advancing against doctors task by task, health professionals come to see patients not as wholes but in accordance with what they can do to them by law. Many policy makers have bemoaned the fact that science and technology have become the filters through which doctors view their patients. But when health professionals emphasize medical tasks as the path to career advancement, the trend toward breaking down a patient's problems into isolated subunits accelerates. Seeing the big picture is less rewarded than defending one's turf and the bits of ground that one has already gained.

The hospitals

The hospitals are also confused about their mission in the new health-care system, and they are particularly vulnerable to the new changes.

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Over the last century, hospitals became the major centers for health-care delivery in the community. Doctors would see patients in their offices, but it was in the hospital that surgeries were performed, that patients were treated for anything other than a minor illness, and that major diagnostic procedures were carried out. The hospitals, especially those attached to the university, also housed the laboratories where important medical research was carried out. The hospital, with its attending physicians, interns, residents, and academic researchers, was a unique place where theory met practice.

But today, the mission of the hospital is unclear. A significant proportion of surgery can now be done on an outpatient basis, prompting entrepreneurs, including doctors, to set up freestanding surgery centers outside of the hospital. Nursing homes have set up subacute wings on their campuses to take care of patients who expect a long recovery (for example, an elderly person with multiple medical problems recovering from hip surgery), making the intensive oversight of patients by hospitals redundant. Traditionally, hospitals were at an advantage in their ability to purchase expensive equipment like CT scanners and MRIs. But today, private operators have sufficient investment capital to set up their own diagnostic imaging centers. Emergency care is also no longer the preserve of hospitals, replaced by "urgent-care centers" located throughout neighborhoods, even inside shopping malls.

The services that the hospital once alone provided are being siphoned off bit by bit, causing the hospital to lose its monopoly and, more importantly, its sense of purpose. The hospital must compete not only with other hospitals but with entirely new kinds of medical units. But hospitals are at a disadvantage, since the new units are generally less regulated by accreditation agencies and therefore have lower costs. In response, hospitals have branched out into other areas of health care. For example, many hospitals are setting up community-health networks and physician-hospital organizations. These alliances with groups of doctors offer insurance packages directly to employers around the community, thereby bypassing the traditional intermediary, the insurance company. Other hospitals are trying to create their own subacute wings on their campuses for elderly patients who need medical care.

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The goal is to create a normal, nonmedical living arrangement for the aged and to offer the added convenience of being close to the hospital and physicians' offices. This puts hospitals in direct competition with nursing homes.

To a certain degree, the decline of the hospital has been prompted by demographics. People living in the suburbs do not want to come into the cities for surgery or mammograms if they can avoid it. Even suburban hospitals can be inconvenient in regard to parking and time wasted navigating the bureaucracy of a large institution. But the decline of the hospital also reflects a dramatic change in American attitudes toward illness. The change is not just an economic or demographic one; it is a spiritual one.

A generation ago, most hospitals, in particular community hospitals, had some kind of affiliation with a religious order. They were nonprofit, charitable organizations, and while their mission was to tend to the sick, they did so with one eye on this world and the other on the world to come. Visiting one of these old hospitals was a unique experience. As a child, I frequently visited a Catholic hospital near my house. The interior was dark and foreboding; the nuns wore black; the atmosphere suggested that irrational forces were at play, that man was not totally in control. The general feeling was one of awe, fear, and hope tinged with a kind of sweet melancholy, for to see patients of all ages and their families, from various social and economic backgrounds, was to catch a rare glimpse of mankind at large. Walking through the halls of such a hospital, one was forever being reminded of the seriousness of the human predicament.

Over the years, the hospital's spiritual element has been effaced. Many hospitals, for example, still have a chapel or a sanctuary of some kind, but these rooms are almost vestigial—a remnant of an old world that is now more quaint than functional. The new, for-profit hospitals exhibit almost no link to this past. Some critics may attribute the change to the growing secularization of America, but that is not the whole story. A new attitude toward health care, fostered by economists and policy experts, must be given its due.

Health care has become just another commodity in the consumer economy, part of the everyday human traffic, and

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thus lodged firmly in the ledgers of business. It has become an economic enterprise, amenable to the laws of supply and demand, and in order to prepare health care for the rational world of economics, the fears and deep insecurities associated with sickness are downplayed, ignored, or concealed from view.

One can see signs of the new attitude in modern hospitals. Some have lobbies made of teak wood and filled with pretty waterfalls, self-playing pianos, and gourmet coffee shops. The delivery rooms look like living rooms, even with the occasional fake fireplace, in order to simulate the experience of giving birth at home. The whole atmosphere is like that of any other commercial store and vastly different from the hospital of yesteryear. The goal is to make health care seem like any other enjoyable consumer experience, say shopping or getting one's nails done—without risk, without suffering, and without reason to fear.

In the past, the hospital was more than a service-delivery place. It was a vital part of the community—a kind of unspoken partnership where benefactors, activists, and volunteers, along with doctors, patients, and families, tried to join the concerns of daily life with something distant and immemorial. It was one of the few places where issues of life and death were treated seriously. The "Doc-in-the-boxes" and one-stop surgery shops that now dot the landscape provide no such sense of transcendence. These entities are business enterprises, nothing more, in which there is rarely a room set aside for prayer, consolation, or meditation.

The insurance companies

The insurance companies are also in a state of confusion. When indemnity health insurance was the model for reimbursement, the insurance companies functioned just as they do for auto, house, and life insurance. Premiums were paid into a common pool, and the money was paid out to hospitals and doctors when a beneficiary became ill. There was a rigid division between the financial side of medicine, which was the preserve of the insurance companies, and the actual practice of medicine, which was the preserve of the doctors and the hospitals. The insurance companies had a well-defined, but carefully circumscribed, role.

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With the rise of managed care, the role of the insurance company has become jumbled. The insurance company retains its financial obligations but, in the form of managed care, has trespassed on what was once the preserve of physicians and hospitals. Medical directors and "utilization review specialists" employed by the insurance companies try to control costs by influencing the management of patients. To no small degree, they are practicing medicine. This has caused a considerable uproar among doctors and the public; the suspicion is that managed care is allowing business calculations to affect the direction of medical treatment. The outrage has prompted nationwide calls for reform, such as the Patient's Bill of Rights.

Policy makers are eager to solve these problems, but they err in trying to pursue reform through a regulatory scheme that has become totally outdated. Traditionally, in most states, the health-care regulatory apparatus of government followed the general scheme of the old health-care honeycomb. There was a health department to regulate the doctors, an insurance commission to regulate the insurance companies, an accreditation agency to regulate the hospitals, and so forth. The regulatory scheme was organized according to the distinct mission of each institution in the total health-care industry.

But while the missions of these institutions have changed, the regulatory scheme of government generally has not. This is particularly true in regard to the insurance companies, since how to regulate them is no longer clear. Many such companies are a peculiar hybrid—part insurance company, part doctor, and for those insurance companies that possess a physical plant, like Kaiser Permanente, part hospital. The same issue holds true for the medical directors of managed-care companies—that is, the physicians who make the decisions whether to reimburse for care. In one sense, they are acting as insurance operatives: They tell people that the insurance company will not pay for a certain test or procedure, not that they can't get it. On the other hand, they are acting as physicians because they are using their medical judgment to determine whether or not a procedure or test is necessary.

In light of the changes that are occurring in health care, what is needed is not a new layer of regulations but a reform of the regulatory apparatus. Perhaps it is the case that medi-

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cal directors represent a new kind of medical specialty and need to have their own certification process; perhaps managed-care organizations are more appropriately inspected and regulated by a new body that is part health department, part insurance commission. These issues need to be resolved.

The same reevaluation needs to take place in the area of tort law. Insurance companies insist they should not be liable for injuries that result from a denial of a claim. They insist that the denial is not an act of medicine but an act of insurance. But the denial unquestionably has a medical consequence, since most people cannot afford to pay out-of-pocket—they rely on their health insurance to pay for care. The same issue arises among managed-care companies that do not employ physicians directly but, rather, form loose associations with panels of doctors. The control they exert is often confusing, and it must be better understood if doctors and insurance companies are to know their respective roles, at the very least to help determine the responsible party in cases of injury.

The patient

In the past, patients viewed medicine as something beyond their ken. They gave up a certain amount of control to doctors and nurses and looked upon the practice of medicine as a kind of magical art that only doctors were competent to perform. Doctors' decisions were rarely challenged, and patients did not educate themselves on medical matters, in part because medical knowledge was not widely available. But all that has changed.

Today, policy makers aim to empower patients, to transform them into consumers with knowledge and a wide range of choice among health-care products. The goal is to increase their happiness by making more goods available, just like in any other commercial enterprise. New medical information outlets on the Internet encourage second-guessing of health professionals, eventually forcing government to cover more and more medical services. Not having access to a certain health-care product is now seen in the same light as not having access to a TV or a telephone. It is considered a problem of distribution and cost. Consumers know what they want—health care—and their happiness depends on it. Getting it to

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them is the problem. This has become the primary concern of health-policy experts.

But in the health economist's model, the patient's dissatisfaction is made to seem somehow abnormal, a temporary glitch in the smooth functioning of a service. Sickness is not an act of Divine Providence but the result of inefficiency in the health-care system. That's why consumers grow angry and confused about their health care. They are told that health care is like any other consumer product, and that if they are dissatisfied, something is wrong with either the system or the product. Our human mortality has all but disappeared from the health-care horizon.

Such an attitude underlies the public's demand that Medicare pay for Viagra, the medicine to cure impotence. No one gets angry when the weather is bad because we see the weather as beyond our control. But health is no longer viewed as a mysterious, uncontrollable phenomenon. Health care is now held to be a product or a service, making bad outcomes and inefficiencies inexcusable. Gone are the days when someone would resign themselves to a difficult condition and say, "It's God's will."

In the mental-health area, where the rational forces of science and economics are colliding with the irrational force of human unhappiness, one can also see the transformation of medicine into a mere commercial product. Over the last few decades, doctors have made a great scientific effort to quantify unhappiness, to catalogue and explain it, to name it—all in the effort to cure it. Unhappiness is no longer perceived to be beyond our comprehension; experts explain, measure, and describe it, all in preparation for packaging treatments and putting them on the market. For example, millions of Americans are now on such mood-modifying drugs as Prozac and Wellbutrin.

There was once a line that separated unhappiness brought on by a physical illness from the unhappiness that was mysterious and inexplicable and perhaps amenable only to religious counseling. In the latter case, unhappiness was not a "mental health" issue but rather a spiritual crisis, a result of boredom or frustration, or the consequence of failure. But when unhappiness is subsumed by science and economics, it is no longer

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clear where the province of health care ends and that of religion begins. The line separating the two disappears, and with it, one of the last checks on consumer demand.

Brave new world?

The problems in health care are all symptoms of the same disease. The health-care honeycomb has collapsed. The missions of the major players in the industry have become jumbled while the expectations of patients are now greater than ever. Like a developing organism that is growing according to its own blueprint, the health-care system seems to be evolving in an unknown direction. The policy experts and managers contributed to this cultural revolution in health care, and now it seems there is little they, or any of us, can do but watch and wait.

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Dilemmas of conservatism

JERRY Z. MULLER

IN an election year, some outcomes are unpredictable, but one is inevitable: Conservatives will fight among themselves. They will accuse one another of having abandoned conservative ideals, admonish each other for having mistaken the essence of conservatism, and abjure their erstwhile fellows for having sold out principle for expediency. Such struggles are not the product of a temporary historical juncture—they are built into the very structure of conservatism, and perhaps American conservatism more than any other.

Conservatism and orthodoxy

What commonly goes by the name "conservatism" in the contemporary United States is an alliance of those who hold two sorts of worldviews which are quite distinct, and which inevitably come into tension from time to time. When conservatism is defined (as it was by Russell Kirk) by the assump-

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tion "that there exists a transcendent moral order, to which we ought to try to conform the ways of society," the conceptual waters are muddied in a way that may be politically expedient but is intellectually obfuscating. For the notion that human institutions should reflect some transcendent order is shared by a variety of nonconservative religious ideologies and was contested by some of the most significant and influential conservative thinkers, beginning with David Hume. Kirk's definition might better be called "orthodox"—a term that suggests adherence to the true faith. Peter Berger once distinguished "conservatives by faith" from "conservatives by lack of faith," which corresponds to the distinction between orthodoxy and conservatism suggested here.

The orthodox theoretician defends existing institutions and practices because they are metaphysically true. (The truth proclaimed may be based on particular revelation or on natural laws purportedly accessible to all rational men.) In contrast, the conservative theoretician defends existing institutions above all because they are thought to have worked rather well. For the conservative, the historical survival of an institution or practice—be it marriage, monarchy, or the market—creates a *prima facie* case that it has served some human need or some useful function. In addition, conservatives tend to be acutely sensitive to the costs of radical change. Elimination or radical reconstruction of existing institutions may lead to harmful, unintended consequences, conservatives argue, because social practices are interlinked, such that eliminating one will have unanticipated negative effects on others.

Such negative consequences, conservatives typically argue, occur because reformers are unaware of the latent functions of existing practices and institutions. Reformers are insufficiently cognizant, it is said, of the contribution of the practice they wish to alter to the functioning of the larger social system of which it is a part. That contribution may be unintended by those engaged in the practice, and most importantly, its function may be unrecognized, or recognized only retrospectively, once the reform of the practice has brought about negative unintended consequences. The expansion of public welfare provisions in the Great Society programs of the 1960s, for example, may have sapped the strength of black

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churches, which once fulfilled important social functions, however imperfectly; and the weakening of such churches may have deprived lower-class blacks of an important source of moral influence.

Those unfamiliar with conservatism sometimes wonder how contemporary American conservatives can hold in high regard Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*—a work that defends monarchy, aristocracy, and an established church—when their country has none of these institutions. The answer is that Burke provided arguments and modes of analysis that can be applied to very different institutional settings. Burke linked the three most common arrows in the quiver of conservative argument—the unanticipated negative consequences of reform, the importance of latent functions, and the interdependence of social elements—when he wrote:

> The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every experimental science, not to be taught a priori. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science; because the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate; but that which in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation; and its excellence may arise even from the ill effects it produces in the beginning. The reverse also happens; and very plausible schemes, with very pleasing commencements, have often shameful and lamentable conclusions. In states there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first view of little moment, on which a very great part of its prosperity or adversity may most essentially depend.

Conservative and orthodox thinkers may sometimes reach common conclusions, but they reach them by different intellectual routes. The distinction between conservatism and orthodoxy is, however, often elided in conservative self-representations, at times because conservative thinkers may regard it as useful for most people to believe that existing institutions correspond closely to some ultimate, unchanging or transcendent truth. The recurrent conservative temptation is to declare preferred policies "self-evident" or a product of "natural law," deviation from which can only be explained by a debased understanding. That, for example, divorce was self-evidently at odds with natural law for Catholics but not for Protestants, or that artificial contraception was self-evidently

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abhorrent to Anglicans in 1850 but not in 1950, might call the assured certainty of such judgments into question. That is precisely why advocates of each position strive to banish the alternative from the mental horizons of their adherents, to maintain what Peter Berger has called the "plausibility structure" of their assumptions, to reinforce the taken-for-granted quality of their beliefs. But it also creates the potential for tension between conservative analysts, who are aware of the partial contingency of moral norms—their dependence upon institutional structures that vary over time and space—and the religiously orthodox, for whom the admission of such contingency may seem tantamount to nihilism, if not heresy.

The religious question

There is no necessary link between conservatism and religious belief. Devout Christians or Jews have embraced a variety of political viewpoints, including liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, while many of the most distinguished conservative theorists have been agnostics or atheists. Conservatism arose in good part out of the need to defend existing institutions from the threat posed by "enthusiasm"—i.e., religious inspiration that seeks to overturn the social order. At the cradle of conservatism, then, lies the recognition that the religiously self-assured can be dangerous. The critique of religious enthusiasm, which was central to Hume's conservatism, was later extended, first by Hume himself and more emphatically by Burke, into a critique of political radicalism. When, during the twentieth century, conservative thinkers chastised communism and fascism as forms of political millenarianism, they took for granted that political millenarianism of a more religious sort was a potentially dangerous force.

Yet if some conservatives have questioned the veracity of religion, most have tended to affirm its social utility. They have made several arguments for the utility of religion: that it legitimates the state; that the hope of future reward offers men solace for the trials of their earthly existence and thus helps to diffuse current discontent that might disrupt the social order; and above all, that belief in ultimate reward and punishment leads men to act morally by giving them an incentive to do so (a proposition long shared by liberals, such as John Locke and Adam Smith).

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Recognition of the social utility of religion is no reflection upon its truth or falsity. It is quite possible to believe that religion is false but useful: In such cases, conservatives may approach the claims of orthodoxy with strategies of tact, prudence, esotericism, or noble lying. But it is also possible to believe that religion is both useful and true, as Aquinas or Maimonides maintained (though in the latter case, much of what his coreligionists regarded as true was regarded by Maimonides as superstition or idolatry). Or one may believe that religion is "true" in a more rational and universalistic sense than in its particular, historical embodiments, but that those particular embodiments are necessary to make religion accessible to the mass of citizens, who may require a less rationalist and abstract version of the faith. As Burke put it, "Superstition is the religion of feeble minds; and they must be tolerated in an intermixture of it, in some trifling or some enthusiastic shape or other, else you will deprive weak minds of a resource found necessary to the strongest."

There are, nevertheless, intrinsic tensions in the alliance between orthodoxy and conservatism, tensions that may remain latent or become manifest depending on the political constellation. In the eyes of conservatives, the orthodox lack intellectual sophistication: Their self-assurance about the answers comes from not having thought hard enough about the questions, from not comprehending the partial or problematic sources of their views. In the eyes of the orthodox, conservatives appear as cynical, as lacking in real conviction, which they believe can only come from acknowledging the absolute source of values.

Utility vs. truth

As we have seen, the conservative, in his role as analyst, is aware that the latent functions of institutions may be more socially significant than their avowed purposes. But latent functions are, by definition, hidden and unappreciated. When previously latent functions become the articulated purpose of institutions, the institutions may cease to fulfill the very functions for which they were originally valued by conservative theorists. Conservative analysts may conclude, for example, that the most important social function of churches is as me-

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diating institutions, providing their congregants with a sense of shared purpose and a shelter from the larger, more alienating institutions of society. But a church in which most members no longer believe in God as the object of their common worship may cease to fulfill its latent social functions. The family that prays together may stay together; but members of a family that pray together in order to stay together may eventually find themselves neither praying nor staying. By emphasizing the latent functions of institutions, then, the conservative analyst may find himself unwittingly transforming and perhaps impairing the very institutions he seeks to conserve.

This results in a characteristic tension of conservative analysis. On the one hand, institutions are defended on the grounds of continuity, utility, and the unanticipated costs of radical change. Yet these institutions may owe their functioning to beliefs that are held by the orthodox, not the conservative. Conservatives who are aware that only genuine belief may be socially functional must therefore take care not to undermine such belief—indeed, to strengthen it whenever possible. This leads to an implicit tension between typically conservative modes of defending institutions and those of their orthodox adherents. Sometimes the orthodox will adopt the language of conservatism in order to reach beyond their own circles. (The career of Ralph Reed exemplifies this process.) And, as already noted, conservatives may adopt the language of orthodoxy while remaining hazy as to just what orthodox propositions they actually affirm and why.

There are inevitable tensions on both sides. At some point, the orthodox tire of assurances that their program is *useful*: They want universal acknowledgment that it is *true*, and the stronger their power relative to other conservative forces, the more this will be the case. (The perceived electoral power of the Christian Right in Republican primaries, for example, made the confession of the born-again experience of Jesus Christ *de rigeur* among Republican presidential aspirants.) Calls of the orthodox for civil disobedience or revolution in the face of laws that they consider to be violations of morality are unlikely to find the same resonance among conservatives, as the controversy provoked by some of the contributions to *First Things*' 1996 symposium, "The End of Democracy?," demon-

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strates. At some point, conservatives may buck at the level of implausible beliefs they are asked to affirm or abide by, say "creation science," or the dangers posed by bar codes bearing the Mark of the Beast, or the repeated assurances that praying along with Pat Robertson during his television show will cure one or another physical ailment.

Whose tradition?

Conservatives often appeal to tradition, in part on the assumption that the very longevity of a tradition is evidence of its intrinsic wisdom, in part because historical continuity increases the emotional hold of such traditions, adding emotional weight to their moral prescriptions. But the conservative appeal to tradition has a number of intrinsic problems.

To begin with, those who appeal to tradition for clear answers to contemporary dilemmas often do so under the impression that traditions are monolithic and offer clear guidance for practice. But old traditions tend to be more complex and tension-ridden than those who embrace "tradition" imagine. The notion that answers can be logically deduced from them is often an illusion, based on ignoring or suppressing part of the tradition.

One problem for any tradition is how to adapt to changing circumstances, or, to put it another way, when to admit that circumstances have changed in a way that requires renovation. As examples of innovation in light of changed circumstances, take the turnabouts of official Roman Catholic doctrine (brilliantly illuminated by John T. Noonan, Jr.) on issues from slavery (once permitted, subsequently condemned), the taking of interest on loans (once forbidden, since permitted), or the doctrine of religious freedom (condemned from 350 A.D. to 1964 as the toleration of heresy, declared by the Second Vatican Council to be a sacred human right conveyed by Christian revelation). As Noonan notes, in each case, the principles once thought to be dispositive were subsequently overruled by other principles, which were also part of Catholic tradition but were given new weight because of historical change. But Catholicism, like most religious traditions, has no theory of historical change which would clearly indicate when change is necessary, acceptable, or prohibited. That leaves room for dispute

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about what changes are needed and when. And it means that those adherents of tradition who engage in innovation or reform are open to the charge of heterodoxy.

But the difficulties caused by intrinsic tensions within traditions and their inevitable, but often unacknowledged, internal transformations only begins to suggest the dilemmas faced by those who recur to "tradition" as the source of political judgments. For any modern society, and the United States perhaps more than any other, is made up of multiple traditions—religious, political, ethnic, and regional.

Coming to terms with such pluralism affects each earlier tradition and leads to its redefinition and reconfiguration. The need for accommodation to, or coalition with, followers of other traditions leads to the creation of new, hybrid traditions, many of which would be regarded by earlier adherents of previously distinct traditions as hopelessly confused, if not heretical. This raises a recurrent dilemma for conservatives of how to legitimate change that breaks with the past. One solution is to recast or reinterpret the institutional past to make it appear continuous with contemporary practice; or, alternatively, to formulate innovation in a way that appears continuous with past practice. Take the "Christian tradition," which encompasses adherents of faiths that once regarded one another as heretics (the Catholic view of Protestants) or slavish followers of "the Whore of Babylon" (long a favored Protestant designation of the Church of Rome). Then there is the "Judeo-Christian" tradition, a relatively recently discovered hybrid, said to include the adherents of faiths that long considered each other as polytheists (on the Jewish side) or deicides (on the Christian side).

The quest to make the past appear homogeneous and a lodestone for present guidance may take ludicrous forms. Take that forum of intellectual combat referred to as "the Western Tradition," which some purport to use as a basis of policy, as if Plato and Augustine, Moses and Montesquieu, were likely to arrive at a single recommendation on homosexuality, school vouchers, or foreign aid.

The real heterogeneity of regional subcultures creates further barriers to deriving clear answers to current challenges from "tradition." From the perspective of the Southern tradi-

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tion of antipathy to government (except to keep down blacks), gun ownership as the guarantor of liberty, and ostentatious religiosity, Rockefeller Republicans look like heretics—and vice-versa. In short, those who regard themselves as "traditional" will often have very diverse conceptions of what that means. And often enough they will be unaware that what is regarded as "traditional" within their own community today is quite different from what was regarded as "traditional" yesterday—or will be regarded as "traditional" tomorrow. The appeal to tradition, then, may itself be a source of conflict among those who regard themselves as conservatives but who seek to conserve rather different things.

Yet to call attention to the importance of divergences between religious or regional traditions is to oversimplify and mislead, for it conveys the impression that each individual is influenced by a single tradition, however defined and redefined. But the multiple traditions that constitute modern society run not only between communities but *within* individuals. As the sometime conservative British political theorist John Gray quite rightly reminds us, modern societies are "post-traditional" in the sense that they encompass a multiplicity of traditions between which individuals may move, or from among which individuals may pick and choose elements. Thus as Gray has noted:

> We are none of us defined by membership in a single community or form of moral life. We are ... heirs of many distinct, sometimes conflicting, intellectual and moral traditions.... The complexity and contradictions of our cultural inheritance give to our identities an aspect of complexity and even of plurality which is not accidental, but essential to them. For us, at any rate, the power to conceive of ourselves in different ways, to harbour dissonant projects and perspectives, to inform our thoughts and lives with divergent categories and concepts, is integral to our identity as reflective beings.

As a result, outside of enclave-like communities of the culturally like-minded, individuals must make decisions about which elements of which traditions will bind their decisions—and to some degree or another most are syncretistic, drawing on what appears useful to them wherever they find it.

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Historicism and its discontents

At some point, an awareness of the inadequacy of appeals to tradition as a guide to policy has led the most sophisticated conservatives, like Hume, Hegel, Sumner, or Hayek, to attempt to demonstrate rationally that the existing institutions they seek to conserve reflect higher, historically evolving norms. This has the advantage of providing grounds for belief and practice beyond those of particular traditions. But the adherents of older traditions respond—quite rightly—that the institutions being defended are at odds with their historic traditions. Thus while the most sophisticated forms of conservatism may be more intellectually compelling, they lack appeal to the orthodox.

There is a further problem with this more sophisticated version of conservatism. To its credit, it tends to be more conscious than orthodoxy that institutions (political, religious, familial) have changed over time, and that a variety of institutional alternatives have proved more or less conducive to human happiness, depending in part on time and place. But such a self-conscious and historically informed conservatism entails a certain measure of historicism and relativism, a situation that generates dilemmas of its own for conservatives.

Historicist conceptions have become an ubiquitous component of modern intellectual life. Although in an extreme form they may be detrimental, no doctrine that does not take the reality of historical change seriously can serve as a plausible guide for policy. Nowhere is this clearer than in regard to perhaps the most dynamic force in modern history, the capitalist economy. For perhaps the most consistent dilemma for conservatives concerns the cultural effects of the market—an institution that conservatives generally favor. Yet, at least since Burke, conservatives have feared that the capitalist market itself, or the attitudes it tends to engender, will erode the premarket and nonmarket institutions upon which conservatives typically believe that the successful functioning of a capitalist society depends. Even when it does not destroy existing institutions, the market tends to transform them. The family, for example, was transformed, beginning in the later nineteenth century, by the declining economic value of child labor and the rising costs of preparing children for market partici-

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pation, both of which led parents to desire fewer children. The rise in women's ability to earn in an economy in which muscle power is ever less important has further altered (and will continue to transform) the relations between men and women and the nature of the family. The modern, liberal-democratic state, modern science, and modern technology have had—and continue to have—similarly transformative effects, all of which make attention to historical change unavoidable for serious analysis. That is why, in one form or another, historicism has been central in conservative thought as well.

Yet the permeation of historicist assumptions may have the effect of undermining conviction in the validity of existing institutions, or indeed in the idea of truth as such. Some truths are no doubt timeless, but adapting them to the times and discovering their timeliness is a Sisyphian task. The challenge for conservatives is to resist the intellectually easy routes of regarding every institutional transformation as evidence of decline, or of claiming that nothing fundamental has changed and that past doctrine need only be reiterated or reinstated.

Resistance or compromise?

All of this helps to explain why the content of conservatism varies not only over time and across national and regional contexts but often among self-proclaimed conservatives at the same time and place. The declaration that one is conservative, while it signifies a certain respect for tradition and for the value of historically evolved institutions, may reveal surprisingly little of operational significance.

The conservation of the institutional legacy of the past inevitably involves a selection from among existing traditions and legacies. Moreover, conservative theory, like all theory, cannot be applied without judgment. Decisions must be made regarding which historical institutions and traditions are viable under changed circumstances, how inherited institutions and practices ought to be revised or revamped, and what part of an institution is essential and what part is superfluous.

In his 1775 speech supporting conciliation with the American colonies, Burke provided a succinct formulation of conservatism's fundamental dilemma:

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> Our late experience has taught us, that many of those fundamental principles, formerly believed infallible, are either not of the importance they were imagined to be; or that we have not at all adverted to some other far more important, and far more powerful principles, which entirely over-rule those we have considered as omnipotent.

This recurrent conservative quandary—when does experience demand a change in the order of institutional priorities?—and the variety of responses to which it gives rise, provides a persistent source of tension among conservatives, and an ongoing stimulus to the reformulation of conservatism.

Conservative thought tends both to emphasize the restraining role of institutions as a prerequisite of human thriving and to defend existing, historically developed institutions on the grounds of their usefulness. Yet conservatism as an articulated intellectual position only arises when the legitimacy of existing institutions can no longer be taken for granted, either because those institutions are under ideological attack or because of social, political, and cultural developments that tend to undermine their authority or their functioning. In this sense, every wave of conservatism is neo-conservatism: It arises to defend institutions that are in fact somewhat different from those defended by previous conservatives. And because institutions that have already been challenged (even if the challenges prove ill-founded) lack the same taken-for-granted quality that they once possessed, or survive the challenge only through considerable alteration, they may appear to their defenders as weakened.

As a result, conservatives are likely to be historical pessimists. Thus, while conservatism is defined in large part by its defense of existing institutions, a recurrent lament among conservative thinkers has been that newer institutions are less adequate than older or existing ones, either because they are unable to command assent, or because they provide inadequate direction to human passions. This proclivity to view contemporary history as a process of decline may already be found in Burke's lament that the age of chivalry is dead. In certain conservative conventicles in the United States, it is believed that things have been going downhill since Nominalism made its appearance in the Middle Ages. Others date the Decline of

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the West to the 1960s. Such hand-wringing expresses the propensity of conservatives to identify the decline of particular institutions with the decline of institutions per se. Because the articulate defense of existing institutions usually comes about only when their stability has been challenged, and given the tendency of conservatives to identify the decline of existing institutions with the decline of institutions as such, conservatism sometimes appears as a defense of lost causes, or a fighting retreat from one institutional outpost to another.

A perennial dilemma for conservatives is when to declare the battle for a particular institution definitively lost. The defense of lost institutions is characteristic of a species of conservatism which might be termed "reactionary" except that it seeks to retreat to a position preceding the status quo ante—"crankiness" seems a more adequate label. A comical self-caricature of this stance was provided by Evelyn Waugh. Requested by a British journal to comment on the upcoming elections of 1959, Waugh responded, "I have never voted in a parliamentary election. I shall not vote this year.... In the last three hundred years, particularly in the last hundred, the Crown has adopted what seems to me a very hazardous process of choosing advisers: popular election. Many great evils have resulted.... I do not aspire to advise my Sovereign in her choice of servants."

Less obviously comical, because less self-aware, is the sort of conservatism which insists upon reasserting values that have lost their institutional moorings. This was the case of the American "Southern Agrarians" of the 1930s and their spiritual offspring who championed the idealized values of the antebellum South long after the social structures that sustained those values had disappeared. Among the issues dividing contemporary conservatives are whether to give up the struggle against legalized abortion, pornography, gambling, and the legitimization of homosexuality. To be sure, there are conservatives who favor each of these, but even for those who are inclined to oppose such practices, the question of whether the battle is winnable, or worth the cost, inevitably arises.

The need for conservatives to react to cultural, social, economic, and political change gives rise to recurrent strategies, each of which have potential pitfalls. When the fundamental

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institutions valued by conservatives appear to be in imminent danger, a strategy of radical action may seem necessary. This is a dangerous course, as conservatives should be the first to know, given the historical sensitivity of conservatism to the hazards posed by the negative unanticipated consequences of action. The opposite strategy is pragmatic flexibility: While a necessity for any political movement, it runs the risk of trading away the fundamental substance of existing institutions in order to avoid unpleasant conflict. The strategy of holding fast to existing institutional arrangements in their totality, by contrast, risks descent into political irrelevance. Those who seek to ban pornography, for example, may simply fail to understand the technical impossibility of doing so, given the nature of the Internet. It has been argued that abortion is so inextricably a part of middle-class life that its recriminalization would not be tolerated by wide segments of the populace. The notion that homosexuals will return to the closet may be as implausible as putting Humpty-Dumpty together again, etc.

Change, in other words, is costly to reverse. That does not mean, of course, that change should never be reversed, or that the benefits may not be worth the political costs. The reversal of entrenched trade union power in Britain and the United States under Thatcher and Reagan provides an example. So does welfare reform, the reduction of crime through a combination of prison building and more effective policing, or the elimination of governmental racial discrimination in the awarding of contracts and in university admissions.

The dilemmas of conservative reform

Of course, conservatism is not wholly reactive. As any historian of modern Europe or observer of recent American experience knows, innovation has always been a part of conservatism. Conservative innovation is based either upon applying to new areas policies that conservatives regard as proven by experience or trying to use novel means to reach conservative goals. (Again, there is a relevant Burkean dictum, "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve.") In recent years, successful social-policy

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innovation in the United States has come largely from conservatives.

Yet conservatives will differ with one another on the advisability of future policy innovations—and differ on eminently conservative grounds. The idea of tax simplification through a flat tax, for example, may be recommended by the likelihood that it would curtail government intrusiveness, reduce the costs of compliance to individuals, and minimize the resources diverted to unproductive functions such as accounting and legal tax sheltering. But a flat tax would also remove an important existing incentive for donating to charities and nonprofit organizations, causes typically championed by conservatives as alternatives to the expansion of government.

Or take the issues of school vouchers and the provision of social services through faith-based organizations. Many conservatives regard these as promising innovations, because they strengthen mediating institutions, increase consumer choice, encourage decentralization rather than governmental direction, and bolster religious communities. But here again, there is room for dissent based upon conservative concerns. For the granting of governmental funds to such schools and organizations may have the unintended, but not unanticipatable, effect of diminishing their autonomy and the their ability to preserve the particular orientations that have made them successful in the first place. Conservatives may also be skeptical of innovations that might radically increase cultural pluralism, including the power of subcultures fundamentally at odds with the ethos of American institutions and antipathetic to integration within the nation state. Such fears may be overstated or unwarranted—but they are eminently conservative.

These, then, are among the structural reasons why conservatives will almost inevitably dispute, confute, and refute one another. That is why conservatism is perennially faced with a "crack-up" but also why it is capable of renovation and dynamism. The same could well be said of liberalism—but that is the subject of another essay.

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Defending suburban sprawl

PETER GORDON & HARRY W. RICHARDSON

IN September 1998, Vice President Al Gore traveled to Portland, Oregon, the urban planners' Mecca, to attack suburban sprawl and support "smart growth." What he actually meant was *managed* growth—higher densities, mixed land uses, energy-efficient construction technologies, and environmentally friendly transportation. By delivering this speech, Gore catapulted the "sprawl debate," formerly a second-tier local issue, into national politics. Perhaps it was inevitable. Most of us live and work in cities, their suburbs, or nearby exurban areas, and how metropolitan areas develop is an issue of concern.

Cities around the world have grown outwards for almost all of recorded history as a result of cheaper travel, better communications, and greater affluence. Suburbia was not a post-World War II, or even a post-automobile, invention. But the strong demand for new housing in the late 1940s made the expansion appear new.

Since 1970, 86 percent of population growth has occurred

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in the suburbs. Today, low mortgage rates boost home ownership and reinforce the wave of suburban expansion. Most growth is in the outer suburbs, exurban areas, and rural areas, including small rural towns—beyond even the "Edge Cities" lauded by journalist Joel Garreau. In the new age of information technology, phrases like the "death of distance," the "end of geography," and the "end of cities" are the rage.

The antisprawl coalition

Suburban growth has unleashed an antisprawl backlash. But this merely reflects the ambivalence of an American public that frets over the "evils" of sprawl while continuing to enjoy the benefits of low-density suburban living. Although Americans, voting with both their feet and their dollars, overwhelmingly prefer to live in suburbs, they also wonder whether they have too much of a good thing, especially if expansive growth has indeed eradicated open space and farmland, generated too much traffic, and undermined a sense of "community."

Seizing upon these anxieties, a large and diverse coalition has formed to combat suburban sprawl. Ambitious architects and urban planers have long offered their own superior visions of urban development, and now they receive powerful support from environmentalists eager to preserve open space and farmland. (Some environmentalists, nevertheless, remain suspicious of "smart growth." They believe that such policies will lead to a kind of "sprawl-lite" that allows politically influential developers to win approval for their projects. For these environmentalists, only zero growth is acceptable.)

Central-city politicians have also become members of the antisprawl coalition. They want to preserve their spheres of influence and make suburbanites feel guilty for eroding the viability of central cities. Not surprisingly, merchants and landowners, afraid that their central-city locations are losing market value, have also joined the chorus. The coalition also includes developers, contractors, and consultants tantalized by the contracts and tax breaks that go with expensive downtown renewal projects, megadollar rail transit, and new convention centers. Redistributionists are also on board, sensing city-suburban disparities that can be mitigated by new "regional" governments.

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Al Gore, only the latest to join this powerful coalition, has made this agenda part of the Democratic platform in the 2000 election. The administration has proposed interest-free loans, financed primarily by bond issues, for antisprawl projects such as buying open space, promoting transit-oriented development, and reducing pollution.

In 1992, the Congress for the New Urbanism, a group of architects, planners, and journalists, was established to promote alternatives to conventional suburban development. The New Urbanist movement "views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge." These may be legitimate issues, but the antisprawl agenda—more bureaucratic planning, limited growth—conflicts with the preferences of the vast majority of American homeowners, who prefer life in the suburbs.

Antisprawl illusions

The arguments advanced by sprawl opponents rarely withstand serious scrutiny. For example, experts have debated whether sprawl has been fueled more by population growth or increased development. For a time, the Sierra Club considered advocating zero population growth as the solution. This "progressive" interest group wanted to ban immigration on the grounds that immigrants who settle in cities induce the native born to flee to the suburbs. The Sierra Club eventually distanced itself from the implicit racism of this argument, and this topic is now banned from its e-mail message boards.

Unfortunately, New Urbanists are quite willing to advance other ridiculous arguments—such as the notion that America is rapidly running out of valuable farmland. U.S. cropland use actually peaked in 1930 and has fallen ever since, as agriculture has become considerably more productive. It simply takes far less labor and land to feed the country than it once did. Limiting farmers' property rights, as the New Urbanists would prefer, would simply lead to food shortages.

The answer lies not in limiting development rights, as New Urbanists advocate, but in finding innovative ways to preserve

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"environmentally sensitive lands." Conservationist groups and local governments, acting with public support, can purchase land and retire it from use. Maryland's Rural Legacy Program is a good example of this approach. Alternatively, states might consider following the example of New Jersey's Pinelands Barrens program, which has saved thousands of acres from development. The program allows landowners to sell development credits, in the form of density bonuses, to developers who build higher density projects in selected towns and accept restrictive covenants on development in the Pinelands.

In the quotidian lives of most Americans, however, the most vexing problem often attributed to sprawl by New Urbanists is traffic congestion, and here too their arguments do not withstand scrutiny. Most people live and work in the suburbs, and most commuting is suburb to suburb. Moreover, our highly mobile population relocates to economize on trips in response to congestion, resulting in the "commuting paradox," where increasing route congestion is compatible with stable or shorter travel times. Average commuting speeds keep rising. The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that average speeds were 28.0 m.p.h. in 1983, 32.3 m.p.h. in 1990, and 33.6 m.p.h. in 1995. Distances are increasing, but trip times have changed little because more trips take place on less congested suburban roads. Where there truly is congestion, it could easily be ameliorated by road-user pricing, where motorists pay to drive on freeways at peak times of the day. Suburbanization is a traffic safety valve, more of a solution than a problem. In fact, the worst traffic and dirtiest air are found in the highest density areas.

Another argument—advanced by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, a coalition of environmental interest groups—is that building more roads does not ease congestion. In the typical case, increasing highway capacity attracts additional traffic equivalent to between one-third and one-half of the new capacity. But in fact, the two major cities that have reduced congestion—Houston and Phoenix—have had major highway projects. Furthermore, not building roads may add to sprawl as congestion induces development further out. In Maryland, for example, developers increasingly build not in congested Montgomery County, which borders Washington, D.C., but in the more peripheral Frederick County.

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The failure of mass transit

People are not willing to abandon their cars for mass transit because the latter cannot compete in door-to-door travel. After more than $350 billion of public spending on mass transit since the early 1960s, both use per capita and miles traveled are at historic lows. Between 1990 and 1995, transit use declined by 24.9 percent in Detroit, 21.3 percent in Chicago, 14.2 percent in Pittsburgh, 9.7 percent in New York, and 4.7 percent in Boston. An anomaly is the very recent 20 percent increase in bus use in New York City, but this is largely explained by the issue of a MetroCard that gives commuters free bus service to the subway. Revenue loss is estimated to be between $300 to 400 million.

The new rail cities perform no better, because their bus systems have been cannibalized to pay for rail. In many cities, heavily politicized and subsidized local transit monopolies continue to promote nineteenth-century rail transit. These systems cannot serve dispersed communities. The planners' solution of returning to high densities to fill the trains has not worked. Few use the expensive new rail transit systems while the more flexible and lower-cost bus services have been cut. Los Angeles County is merely one example. From 1985 to 1995, transit use declined by approximately 1 billion boardings during a period when $7 billion was spent on new rail transit. This occurred while the county's population grew by 12 percent—mostly as a result of the immigration of low-income workers, transit's natural market. Planners typically react to these policy failures by building high occupancy vehicle lanes, despite the fact that carpooling is declining. New Jersey is the first state to convert such lanes back to conventional use, a courageous admission of policy failure that few are likely to follow.

The best-known New Urbanist communities—Kentlands, Maryland, Laguna West, California, and Seaside and Celebration, Florida—are case studies in the failure of antisprawl planning. These communities are built on the urban periphery, partly because of land-supply constraints and partly because of "Not in My Backyard" opposition to development. The extensive landscaped space in these communities attracts leisure walkers from the outside, but the residents continue to

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drive. These developments do little to decrease the number of vehicle miles traveled per household.

Nor do these communities advance other New Urbanist goals. Their residents are overwhelmingly white and affluent, with average household incomes more than 50 percent above those of surrounding communities, which thwarts the egalitarian goals of the New Urbanism. They typically have rigid design codes governing everything from window treatments to paint colors to parking restrictions, thereby reinforcing the suburban homogeneity that New Urbanists detest. Finally, these households have no more children than the average American household, thereby undermining the New Urbanist goal of building child-friendly communities.

Attached to detached homes

Most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cities developed around manufacturing firms that had located near sources of raw materials or places with superior access to ports, trading centers, and highway junctions. This was where the jobs were and where people seeking work crowded as long as commuting was expensive. Good highways and cheap communications reversed this dynamic in the late twentieth century: Many firms now follow the labor force to the suburbs where their employees live. This is where most of the job growth has occurred in recent decades. Since 1989, private employment has grown faster even farther out in nonmetropolitan counties. In contrast to this "rural rebound," downtown job growth in America's top 25 cities is close to zero.

Inner-city unemployment is sometimes blamed on the suburbanization of jobs. According to this "spatial mismatch" hypothesis, the lack of extensive and easily accessible transit separates poor inner-city residents from well-paid workers in the suburbs. Yet skilled people get jobs wherever they happen to live as do those with ambition and good work habits. The experience of immigrants speaks for itself. And inner-city unemployment is prevalent in New York City, the U.S. transit capital, where reaching far flung jobs is the easiest.

Furthermore, survey data consistently show that up to 80 percent of American households—regardless of income or current form of residence—would prefer to live in a single-family

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home. The argument that smaller families would prefer townhomes, condos, or apartments is belied by the superior market performance of single-family homes in areas where a variety of housing types compete with each other. In areas with high land prices, income constraints compel some households to accept apartments or condominiums. Where and when land is expensive, developers build housing biased toward higher densities, and market forces—not urban planners—create a "compact city." The challenge is to design moderate-density, single-family homes with landscapes that preserve privacy. But, even under these circumstances, a significant proportion of households will move farther out to preferred low-density environments.

In order to avoid criticizing the preferences of consumers, New Urbanists argue that suburbanization in the United States is the result of government policies—the tax treatment of mortgages, public highway investments, rigid zoning codes. But the fact is that suburbanization now occurs everywhere, even in Europe, where huge but largely unsuccessful efforts have been made to prevent sprawl, including exorbitantly high gasoline taxes. In suburbanizing Europe (with very few exceptions, such as Vienna), transit use is falling, auto use is rising. The same is true in many Canadian cities.

Any reversal of urban-development patterns is bound to be extremely costly, if not impossible. People do not want cities that look like New Urbanist dreams, and they certainly cannot afford them. The failure to "revitalize" downtowns and resuscitate urban public transit use, especially in the larger metropolitan areas, indicates that recentralization will not occur. But are the New Urbanists right to argue that community is weakened by suburban life? This is, of course, an elusive question, but it seems unlikely that community will be created by bureaucrats and planners.

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The editors invited James Q. Wilson, Michael Novak, and Alvin Kernan to comment on David Bosworth's "The Spirit of Capitalism, 2000," which was published in the Winter 2000 issue of the magazine. The original article can be read on our website at www.thepublicinterest.com.

Two cheers for capitalism

JAMES Q. WILSON

AS I read David Bosworth's splendid language, his extraordinarily balanced phrases and keen satirical wit, his lively use of striking examples coupled with enduring issues, I found that I started to ask myself, Do I know anybody like the people he describes? Do I know people who deny death, flatter the "inner child," whose lives "are now stocked with the jingles of commerce," and whose humane responsibilities are "increasingly purchased rather than performed"? Surely I should, since I was raised in California and now live—God forbid—in Malibu.

But I don't. They are not my children, nor their friends, nor my friends, nor my sister, nor any of our cousins. Some of these people are religious, some are not, but all behave like adults. They are not caught up in the merciless, soul-shattering experience of being both a "Producing Self" and a "Consuming Self." They work hard, but they come home to a quiet family. They buy what they need and indulge in some of the newer technological innovations, but they are not obsessed by a desire to own. They smile at the phrase, sometimes seen on bumper stickers, that he who dies with the most toys wins, but they don't believe it. They think—as I do—that a person wins who dies having left behind decent children, a reputation for honesty, and some accomplishment that may benefit others.

Perhaps I live in a unique and vanishing world. I am getting along in years; my mind was shaped by the Second World War; I am not much attracted to fashion. But then neither are my

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relatives or friends, and many of them are much younger than I.

I SUSPECT that what's wrong is Bosworth's tendency to see glimpses of an assumed world and then think that he has seen the whole of it, and thus that the world is entirely as he has imagined it to be. Much of what Bosworth describes exists—parents obsessed with "quality time" and relentlessly catering to their children's every illusory "need," government officials who are the captives of "special interests," schoolrooms that are "duchies of the postindustrial economy," young people fascinated by the language of rap artists who are faking their rebelliousness because that seems to sell. But to make an argument about an entire culture, and about its economic roots and moral tendencies, requires the one thing that is left out of Bosworth's rhetorical flourishes: facts.

I had long thought that the purpose of this magazine was to subject high-flown rhetoric to critical analysis by asking whether the claims were generally true, whether the effects that are lamented were produced by the causes suggested, and what practical alternatives existed that might reduce the harms without creating worse ones of their own. Apparently my assumption has outlived reality.

Let me take one example. With Bosworth, I am deeply worried about the effects on children of having two working parents. I prefer children to be raised by a parent—of necessity, almost always the mother—who stays home. I fear that children raised by professional childrearers will suffer. But are my fears—and Bosworth's—correct? I have looked hard at the studies that have been done about this and can find hardly any that show my worries to be well-founded. Maybe the studies were badly done (though there are many, by many different authors). Maybe they did not ask the right questions. Maybe they were inattentive to the subtle, but important, aspects of human personality. Or maybe I am wrong, and so is Bosworth. Until I know the facts, I will be cautious in my comments.

Caution is not a word that can be applied to Bosworth. He is in high dudgeon, and like all true believers he knows what is true without bothering to ask if it is true. At one point he laments the absence of the "true humility [that] is the source of the most profound sort of pragmatism," a phrase that would have more power if anywhere in his essay he displayed even a trace of humility.

But let us suppose that the defective world in which he believes the middle class now lives is in fact as bad as he

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thinks it is. What has caused this deplorable state of affairs? To him, it is "our capitalist economy" that produces professors trying to freeze their brains, MIT scientists desiring to achieve immortality, schoolrooms that are the prisoners of advertising, and people who are selfish "Avid Consumers." Art, academia, and religion have, according to him, been corrupted by commerce. This has all happened, he suggests, because capitalism "is necessarily anti-establishment" and so produces disruption and dissatisfaction.

BOSWORTH appears to be a right-wing Marxist, believing that the economy is the dominant social force in society but arguing that this force is chiefly harming the middle class. Hardly anywhere in his essay do we read about crime, drug abuse, single-parent families, or low-wage workers. Instead, we read about true human needs—the needs of the serious bourgeoisie—that have been tainted by the relentless rational materialism of capitalist production. One is reminded of Marx's early writings in which he said that man should hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, and discuss literature after dinner. For neither today's Bosworth nor a younger Marx should there be any Avid Consumers. (Perhaps the early Marx was also a right-wing Marxist.)

More accurately, I think, we can find in Bosworth the modern-day echoes of John Ruksin, who in 1862 wrote that a "real science of political economy" is one that would teach nations "to desire and labour for things that lead to life" and to "scorn and destroy the things that lead to destruction." By contrast, any political economy that is "founded on self-interest" is one that would bring "ruin into the Economy of Heaven." There is, said Ruskin, "no wealth but life," and national richness consists in nourishing the "greatest number of noble and happy human beings."

The economy has certainly made more likely certain kinds of lamentable behavior; after all, without material abundance it is hard to misuse any abundance. One cannot sell Gangsta Rap until the radio is invented, and one cannot abuse television until nearly every home has one.

But what has the economy done save put in place things that can be used for bad, as well as good, purposes? When Ruskin wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century, it would have been a bit difficult to make the average man into someone who is "noble and happy," because most people lacked an education, a chance to buy decent clothing, and the time in

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which they could perform any noble deeds. A member of the British elite lived 17 years longer than the average man.

THE problem that our modern life reveals is not that affluence corrupts but that human nature is corruptible. Give people freedom and prosperity, and they will do both wise and foolish things, and these things in greater abundance than when they were poor and over-worked. People are both self-interested and altruistic, self-regarding and other-regarding, playboys and homebodies, devoted to amusement as much as to education. On balance, I think the other-regarding features of human nature outweigh the self-regarding ones. Were that not the case, women would not have children, men would not marry the mothers of their children, voting would not occur, and philanthropy would be extinct except when it could be done for public adulation. People are disposed to sociability and hence to morality, though it is only a disposition and not a rule. But my belief is quite different from Bosworth's: He asserts, without explaining, that "the totality of domestic life is being shaped by economic models." Oh? If so, why do women have children? There is no economic gain to them and much pain in the process.

It is not the economy but the culture that produces some of the problems that upset Bosworth and many other people. Capitalism can exist with a great variety of social systems. Victorian England was capitalist, so also was America of both the 1940s and the 1990s, and so as well are Japan and Singapore, Sweden and Taiwan. But all have very different cultures. Some emancipate people from public restraint, others subordinate people to it. Some value self-expression, others self-control.

Material abundance allows people to do both good and bad things. If one wanted to reduce the bad things, there are only two alternatives—repressive government or general poverty. (In fact, only one thing: By and large, repressive governments go hand in hand with general poverty.) Nowhere does Bosworth speak of how to reduce what he dislikes about our culture, save for some remarks about the Judeo-Christian ethic. But America is already the most religious of any industrialized nation, a fact for which I am most grateful. Grateful or not, it is far from clear just how a deeper ethical life would keep mothers at home, eliminate professional child care, or cut back on suburban cul-de-sacs, or why Japan preserves many customary formalities despite having next to nothing in the way of a religion.

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But I will go—and in the pages of this magazine[1] have gone—much further. Capitalism is not simply an amoral, much less an immoral, tool for material satisfaction. Capitalism depends upon and enhances moral qualities by stimulating deferred gratification, encouraging risk-taking, and rewarding the customary decencies in buyer-seller transactions. Capitalism contributes to self-discipline by encouraging trust, civility, and fairness at the same time that it heightens self-indulgence by awakening our senses and sharpening our appetites. In so doing, of course, it has made it easier for some of us—but far from most or all of us—to engage in the kind of luxurious depravity against which Adam Smith so cogently warned us.

An immoral economy is a planned one, since it is based on the false assumption that one person can plan another's well being. Such an assumption will inevitably lead to profound errors that are then protected by autocratic government. An amoral economy is a primitive barter, where a good price goes to your family or a close friend and a high price to a stranger with little, if anything, spent on technological progress. A good economy is ours, though its goodness is limited because people are limited. If people are left alone—which is what capitalism largely does—they will do many things, most good and some bad. The bad is the price of the good.

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[1] "Capitalism and Morality," *The Public Interest*, Number 121, Fall, 1995.

Capitalism and the human spirit

MICHAEL NOVAK

I DOUBT that neoconservatives have (or ever had) a creed, but I am willing to commit myself to the truth of the following propositions: Economics is fundamental, and yet prior to economics is politics; prior to politics is culture; and at the root of culture lies formal public worship, embodying beliefs about God and man in dramatic form (*cult*, in its primary sense).

In our current cultural fog, David Bosworth's "The Spirit of Capitalism, 2000" is a danger sign at the edge of a cliff, and not a few people are likely to be alerted by it. Still, I note that

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every time Bosworth mentions capitalism, he veers off to stress "its scientific methods" and "strict rationalism." His real target is less economics than culture—less the economic functions of a capitalist order, which are compatible with several kinds of culture, than the scientific rationalism of our age.

Bosworth draws upon a venerable tradition in seeking out "a fatal flaw" in capitalism. He leans heavily upon Daniel Bell's magisterial *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* and Max Weber's angry "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart"—the pin-striped bourgeois businessman who pales in comparison with the chivalrous Teutonic Knight. He might also have cited (as Gertrude Himmelfarb does in *One Nation, Two Cultures*) Josef Schumpeter's view that the "creative destruction" practiced by capitalism is eventually turned by its intellectual class against its own walls, flying buttresses, and very foundations, bringing "the whole scheme of bourgeois values" crashing down.

Each of these three analysts of capitalism diagnoses a different flaw. Bell argues that the success of one generation's asceticism tempts a later generation into hedonism. Weber imagines that the central form of reason in capitalism is that of the assembly line and the locomotive track: standardized, abstract, logical, calculated, confining man to an "iron cage." Schumpeter argues that the essential note of capitalism is the corrosive acid of criticism and novelty, eating away at everything fixed and solid.

Bosworth's analysis draws upon these authorities. He argues that our post-industrial habits of *producing* and *consuming* are no longer checked by the old Protestant ethic and civic spirit of the Founders. Today, these habits jump the banks of economic activities and flood into all aspects of life—the home, child-rearing, family life, and leisure. To achieve seemingly noble goals—self-fulfillment, sufficient economic well-being for the good things of life, even those spiritual pursuits such as education and appreciation of the arts—modern men and women race like rats on a treadmill. We don't have time or space for the true, the good, the beautiful. Our lives have become instrumentalized, banal, petty, and even selfish.

IN my view, Bosworth's essay is itself proof that our culture is about to turn in a new direction. The unease Bosworth records is evidence of the creative possibility in capitalist life that its critics consistently overlook. If I am correct, what we will increasingly reject in the near future is the spiritually

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empty secular culture that Bosworth justly lampoons, precisely because it is as humanly inadequate as he describes. What will thrive, inspired by a different and more humane culture, will be the modest functioning of capitalism rightly understood.

Capitalism, we must continually remind ourselves, is the name of an *economic* system. This economic system has historically been mated to several different kinds of *political* systems and to an even wider array of *cultural* systems. Bosworth's complaints are directed (or should be) against cultural phenomena, not economic procedures in themselves. Capitalism is compatible with a far more humane culture than the dehumanizing childishness of the present age. As he himself notes, the destructive cultural traits he now opposes were once upon a time

> largely avoided in America because our own version of rational materialism, "scientific capitalism," was preceded by, and (at first) politically allied with, strong traditions of both local governance and religious freedom—i.e., the original, still spiritually grounded Protestant ethic. Given those origins, our society managed to maintain a humane balance of power.

Bosworth is rightly sorry that the old culture has been replaced by one as inferior as our own.

Perhaps I need to spell out exactly what I mean by capitalism. The distinctive virtue of the economic system of the United States is the large scope it gives to enterprise, invention, and discovery—in short, to the creative insight of entrepreneurs. This is the source of its unparalleled dynamism and the torrent of new technologies it has generated since the inclusion of the Patent and Copyright Clause in the Constitution of 1787. Of course, this dynamic institutional core is supported by a panoply of other institutions: the rule of law; individual rights; open and easy incorporation of new businesses; sound business laws and law-abiding corporate practice; access to venture capital; relatively low taxes; universal education; and a culture that delights in creating the new.

Such an economic system is based on the creative intelligence of individuals far more than material or structural factors. Contrary to Bell, this system depends more on creativity than on asceticism. Contrary to Weber, this system depends more on surprise, serendipity, and creative chance than on calculative logic. Contrary to Schumpeter, this system depends more on creative solutions than on corrosive destruction. (The replacement of an obsolete technology is not pure destruction

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but the yielding of an inferior to a superior solution to human needs.)

Still, even if the reader does not share this fundamentally different analysis of capitalism and its virtues, I believe agreement will be swiftly forthcoming on this point: Bosworth succeeds better in diagnosing the maladies of our current culture—scientific, rationalist, instrumentalist—than of our current economy. Indeed, our economy would work even better, and face a happier and longer future, if it were married to a more spiritually robust culture.

IN a sense, Bosworth's essay is far more useful as a cultural artifact—an autobiography—than an analysis of the economic functioning of capitalism in our time. When he was seated on a raised platform at his friend's bar mitzvah in the 1950s, adored by the adults seated below, he and his fortunate friends were, to an older generation scarred by the Great Depression, the Holocaust, and the Second World War, symbols of life, prosperity, and hope. No preceding generation faced such a bright future of freedom, travel, and educational possibility as these fresh-faced, embarrassed, wriggling thirteen-year-olds of the 1950s. One can sympathize fully with the bedazzlement of the long-suffering older generation seated at their feet, and understand why it seemed so important to them to raise up these young ones for all the world to see and admire. These young were their triumph over all the forces of evil and darkness of our century.

It is true, of course—and it is Bosworth's merit that he sees this so clearly—that a future of near scientific rationalism is now smothering this triumph. Scientific rationalism kills the spirit—kills, even, sensuality—and corrupts the vitalities of the human body. As the inner form of a human culture, scientific rationalism stirs in memory some painful chords of Stalinism and Nazism, and awakens a quiet desperation in the human heart. These chords will forever be associated with the twentieth century; their eternal imprint gives Bosworth's essay its poignancy. Neither capitalism nor democracy alone will prevent Americans or any other people from slipping into "a culture of death," as lethal to the human spirit as an invisible gas. Culture is deeper than politics or economics. Culture kills—or gives life.

Bosworth takes a wrong turn when he blames the economics of *producing* and *consuming* for what has gone wrong in

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the life of the spirit today. That was Marx's turn. To take that turn is already to diminish the power of the human spirit. It is to confer on mere economic habits the power to predetermine everything else. Give me the means of production, I'll mold a new human being. Give me the allures of consumption, I'll enfeeble the human spirit. This theory defines religion and morality in purely materialist terms. It blames capitalism for modern man's cultural decline and ignores capitalism's real, but limited, virtues.

Bosworth's essay recounts how he recognized that his desires and his way of looking at things were turning him into a creature he did not like—but that in his soul lived remnants of a culture, literary and perhaps religious, that did not allow him to approve of where he was heading. And so he stopped and took stock. "Trapped inside this ethical blind, customized to its selective unawareness," he awakened, looked round, repented, and set out to "recover those practices and refashion those places" where "the judgments of value and of faith" have a home.

This "home," of course, is our families, the chief carriers of our judgments of value and faith. Yet more profound sources of these judgments lie in deeper wells than those of any one family—in culture and tradition, and especially the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which nourishes all families. We know (we are told by this worship) that this God is the Creator of all things, and that He has made each of us in his image. We know that He calls each of us in our liberty to accept his invitation to be his friend, or not. Our liberty, one by one, is crucial to Him. Every story in the Bible has that liberty as its axis. He is Father of all human beings, and calls all to be one community in peace and justice, and to accept building up such a civilization as our historic task, the measure of progress and decline. He has special care for widows, orphans, the poor, the neglected. He transcends the world He made. Creation is separate from Him, although he understands, wills, and loves every detail of it, and gave us minds so that we might come to understand and appreciate all that He has wrought.

THE worship service that expresses these beliefs gave rise to the great North Atlantic civilization that we know as "the West." But it has also, by the year 2000, given rise to a worldwide culture—a culture in embryo, really—for it is still divided by rival civilizations, however drawn together centrip-

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etally by many common energies and desires. The beliefs flowing from this worship service also altered the world's conception of politics and economics, not by a direct path but dialectically, through bloody, ironic, and often paradoxical turns. The dignity of every human being—rooted by this cult in God's proposed friendship with every living man and woman—came eventually to be best represented politically in democratic regimes that recognize the rule of law, limited government, separated powers, and fundamental individual rights.

From a very early period, furthermore, biblical peoples recognized that a regime of private property ("Thou shalt not steal") is a superior guarantor of the common good; that markets encourage opportunity and the growth of knowledge (Jerusalem in the biblical period was chiefly a marketplace on the crossroads of three continents); and that double-entry accounts are a practical guide to economic success. Yet it took centuries for the key institutions of the free economy to be worked out by trial and error: the institutions of discovery, invention, and enterprise; institutions that protect the power of property in ideas and inventions; institutions that make the incorporation of new businesses and sources of credit accessible even to the poor. Only then, after millennia, did the system we today know as "capitalism" arise, and begin to spread universally around the planet. Economic historians recognize the role of Judaism and Christianity in spreading these institutions and in giving birth to their internal dynamic: the delight in the new, the joy of discovery, and the imperative to create.

The connections between a cult (a liturgy of worship) and the cultures it inspires are complicated enough. The connections between a cult and the political and economic systems it helps to generate are even more complex, often indirect, and always the fruit of trial-and-error, contingency, and remarkable individuals and events.

Irony has seldom been absent. For instance, the same secular governments that boasted of their edicts of toleration actually meant state control and regulation of religion. A movement calling itself "Enlightenment" and describing its foes as forces of "Darkness" would not, on the face of it, seem to be a movement of reason, tolerance, and evenhandedness; yet such it claimed to be, and in some ways succeeded in being, while in other ways becoming an instrument of repression. The same Catholic Church that in John Paul II's encyclicals welcomes democracy, suitably defined, as the best protection for human rights, and capitalism, under certain conditions, as the system

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the Church judges most likely to lift up the poor, once (and not so long ago) denounced democratic movements in Italy, and spoke almost as harshly of capitalism as of communism.

Even Bell went too far, I think, when he spoke of capitalism's "contradictions." Contradictions is perhaps too Hegelian a term for the dance of tendencies within cultures. The strict and universal fulfillment of cultural ideals virtually never occurs in history, and even those historical moments that fall far short of that, but do show considerable virtue and heroism—those "golden ages" to which poets and preachers love to appeal—do not long endure. For human nature is weak. There is, as Lincoln put it in his address to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois (January 27, 1838), a kind of moral entropy in human societies. The virtues that grandfathers exemplified in the face of great perils their sons could scarcely imitate, and their grandsons find antiquated and boring. In the generation of those who fought for Independence, almost every adult male had participated in some of the scenes of war:

> The consequence was, that of those scenes, in the form of a father, a son or a brother, a *living history was* to be found in every family—a history bearing in the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in the scars of wounds received, in the midst of the very scenes related—a history, too, that could be read and understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned. But *those* histories are gone. They *can* be read no more forever. They *were* a fortress of strength; but what invading foemen could *never do*, the silent artillery of time *has done*; the levelling of its walls.

Further, the complaint of the elders about the young is as ancient as the ruins of Rome, and even then was hoary enough to be mocked: *O, tempora! O, mores!* This turn of events is not a "contradiction" due to capitalism, it is inherent in human affairs. High virtue is difficult to maintain, and heroism is not quotidian. The natural level of human behavior is, as the English say, "muddling through."

BUT the other side of this prosaic truth is that—at least on this side of the Atlantic—Great Awakenings do sometimes happen. The very dissipation of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren leads to the sort of disillusionment—or wake-up call—described by Bosworth. What is distinctive about the human spirit is its capacity for seeing through its decadence—and, where the grace of God is present, its capacity for repentance and conversion. The human being *can* invent a new

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horizon for his or her future, individual by individual, and in sufficient numbers to generate cultural renewal. Worship is restored, cultures are reinspired, civilizations are reborn.

In this country, the home par excellence of capitalism and democracy, we have had three Great Awakenings, and some hold that we are in the early stages of a Fourth. The First is usually dated from about 1730, and played no small role in the renewed conviction of Americans that God endowed each of them with certain inalienable rights, and that Providence would smile kindly on their growing sense of independence, even in the face of the greatest army and navy in the world. The Second Awakening arose a century later and corrected the dissipation (i.e., the vast consumption of alcohol) that followed on Independence; it also fed the growing abolition movement, which argued against "free choice" (the slogan of the pro-slavery forces). The Third Awakening arose at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and inspired the efforts of the Social Gospel movement to deal with urban slums, crime, poverty, and family breakup.

All of these Awakenings began in a religious quickening, in worship services. There they inspired centrifugal actions, movements, and organized efforts, often in a secular direction. They had great effects upon the nation's political and social life, including its economic life.

In my view, the prosperity brought by today's new economy is already playing a powerful role in summoning a Fourth Awakening into being, just as, admittedly, it leads many into temptation. Many persons I meet and read about are saying to themselves in these days of plenty: "There must be more than this" or "This isn't right, this isn't the way I want to live." The high prosperity of our time is even now teaching many affluent and successful professionals—may I cite Bosworth as an exemplary case?—that "Man does not live by bread alone." No time is as apt for learning that lesson as one in which bread is plentiful beyond compare. No wonder ours is a time of many spiritual conversions and new beginnings and changes of direction.

At first, such changes are no more than local movements of individual molecules of yeast in dough. When the whole bread begins at last to rise, however, one sees an Awakening. As always, individuals are the first bearers of life. The source of our hope is the elemental veracity of Jewish and Christian worship. Although entangled in irony and ambiguity, its empirical record is plainly discernible in history. It is, on balance, creative.

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Y2K America

ALVIN KERNAN

LIKE most people, I typically discount jeremiads like David Bosworth's "The Spirit of Capitalism, 2000," which describe a deep and possibly fatal corruption in American society. After all, the people I know all seem to lead sensible, quiet lives. In business, the people I encounter seem to know what they are doing and are about as helpful as one can reasonably expect. But it is when I encounter some bureaucratic or technological snarl, like a telephone answering system that offers endless choices but never the one I need, that I feel that the world no longer makes sense. And so, something about Bosworth's indictment of Americans for a lack of "moral adulthood," for never having grown up, rings true, as does his description of a society in which "toleration gives way to decadent license, civil solicitude to venal solicitation, as everything becomes 'good' and anything 'right.'"

But the disease appears to me to be more in what we might call our "public world" than in the private realms of family and the individual psyche. Most of our information about the world, at least most of mine, comes from the media, newspapers, TV, films, magazines, books, and omnipresent advertising. These, with the exception of some of the books, do indeed present a horrific scene. The maniacal violence of movies, TV, and rap music; the false promises of politicians running for office; the destructive myths of advertising that promise happiness with a new car or a six-pack of beer; the courts that so pervert "justice" that the "rule of law" becomes an absurdity; the flagrant way in which Wealth bribes Politics and calls it "freedom of expression"; the special interests that lobby for the "right to bear arms," even as schoolchildren assassinate their classmates; the boobs who rush to the talk shows to tell the sordid details of their strange, typically sad lives. Everyone can add to this amazing spectacle of a world gone mad with sex, violence, power, and money. No wonder, seeing only this, that the European and Asian governments try to protect their societies from becoming Americanized. But this is not the whole of America, or even the heart of it; this is that strange public world on which, as on some gigantic stage, some of the

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most bizarre people the world has ever seen will do literally anything to raise their "name recognition" for the sake of fame and fortune.

Bosworth is right in his perception that there is some kind of sentimental rot, some age-long childishness, that is at work on our people, though perhaps it has not penetrated as deeply into the core as he fears. Have you ever winced when abroad at the silliness of our teenagers compared to their European peers? Have you ever wondered how many occasions of phony concern there are when you see aisles and aisles of specialized greeting cards for sale? Can anyone really care that much and that often?

Bosworth sees this "rash and rational immaturity" as the product of excessive, corrosive capitalism. We have become, he says, a nation of efficient producers and mindlessly excessive consumers who have lost our spiritual bearings. But in my opinion, the disease is not so much modern capitalism as it is excessive democracy. Not the old meat-and-potatoes kind of democracy that rid us of kings and priests, and for the first time made political and legal equality at least a possibility for every person, but a particularly virulent kind of super-democracy, Y2K democracy.

DEMOCRACY in America has always been an exuberant, overreaching idea that has extracted the last full measure of hypocrisy from its citizens, and in times of prosperity, like our own, it promises more than it can (or should) deliver. Everybody has a right to go to college, or to receive every possible medical treatment without regard to expense, or not to be disliked because of race, sex, or creed. Relativism is, as Bosworth points out, our reigning philosophy, and in a radical democracy, Everyman is as good a thinker as Otherman. All men must be equal in fact, even though the evidence is clear—nothing could be clearer—that they can't be.

This leveling hyper-democracy has grotesquely distorted and perverted some of our most basic, time-tested values and institutions: Law, government, education, the family, art, the army, and the media are bloated with excessive democracy to the point where they are close to ceasing to function. Lawyers grow rich ensuring that every client gets his "rights" protected in personal injury cases and endless appeals; pornography is sold publicly under the name of "freedom of expression"; students are admitted to college not on the basis of their intellectual abilities but by affirmative action; the armed services are

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measured not by their ability to make war but by their enlistment and treatment of women and homosexuals.

Let it not be thought that I am an antidemocratic royalist or fascist autocrat. Quite to the contrary. I believe that democracy has already worked miracles in America, and will do more if its principles are not carried to such an extreme that it destroys itself.

An old philosopher once said that "when virtue leaves the heart, it takes refuge on the lips," and so it is with democracy as well. Underneath the endless chatter about democratic values an enormous swindle is taking place. The very excess of American democracy, its goldrush enthusiasm to democratic equality, allows the wrong kind of elitism, and the wrong kind of elites, to manipulate populism and grab power and money in the process. Anyone can claim to be a victim and sue the company with the deepest pockets for any disaster, from lung cancer to cutting your hand on a light bulb, but the lawyers end up with the money. Whenever the common people are praised for being rugged individualists—like the Marlboro Man who smokes he-man cigarettes or the flinty outdoorsman who takes his four-wheel-drive sports utility vehicle into the unknown wilderness—you can bet that some combination of advertisers, media moguls, and manufacturers is leading the sheep to the slaughter once again. Whenever a politician puts his hand over his heart and speaks of the will of the people, put your hand on your wallet.

IN plain words, Y2K democracy is a glitzy scam that needs to be washed off with acid from time to time to show how it really works. This stripping process has traditionally been the work of satire, though this literary genre has never been, for obvious reasons, a popular art form in America, where the motto is always, "BOOST DON'T KNOCK." Mark Twain, Sinclair Lewis, Nathanael West, Tom Lehrer, Lenny Bruce, Joseph Heller, and Herblock have made something of a go of it, but the Englishman Evelyn Waugh is, in my opinion, the greatest satirist in the twentieth century. Understatement is the key to his satiric art. His pages are alive with people saying and doing the most abominable things while those around them take little or no notice. Brenda Last in *Handful of Dust*, my favorite Waugh novel, hears that her son John has been killed by a kick from a horse, and exclaims, "oh thank God," when she learns that it was not her lover, the wretched John Beaver. No one at all seems to notice, or they are too polite to

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make any fuss if they do. Dr. Messenger, a kooky explorer in the same book, tumbles over quite a small fall in a South American river: "They were unspectacular as falls go in that country—a drop of ten feet or less—but they were enough for Doctor Messenger." The movie altogether missed the point and turned the drop into a roaring Victoria Falls.

Waugh's understatement is a very English skill, and however much we may admire it, it will not do for America. Understatement is not going to catch very much, if anything, of what goes on in our country. Indeed, overstatement has to run for all it is worth to keep up with our countrymen, and even then it often falls far behind. An American satirist who spent the day writing shocking satiric exaggerations would turn on the evening television news to learn that two schoolboys had killed a number of their teachers and their fellows, and that the Congress had responded instantly by requiring that a copy of the Ten Commandments be posted in every schoolroom. Hit the remote control and there would be the president of the country telling us that "sex" does not include the kind of oral pleasure he had been enjoying with a young volunteer in the White House. This would be followed by an advertisement, in which the former head of the senate, a distinguished war hero, hypes Viagra and tells us how it has conquered ED (erectile dysfunction) and made his wife, who is running for president, happy. This will be followed by another little playlet—ads never come in single spies but in battalions—in which a member of a jury sits in agony, in dire need of an ointment to relieve his "tormenting rectal itch."

OURS is a land of extremes. The temperature rises to well over 100 and drops below minus 40. Hurricanes and earthquakes, drought and flood, tornadoes and other ill winds race across it. It is a wild country, Cowboy and Indian land still, and its inhabitants gallop across the landscape with unnatural lights in their eyes. These questers will never hear the rifle shots of understatement; the canons of exaggeration will only distract them for a moment. On they ride, hell for leather, toward the horizon, going to Camelot, looking for the Fountain of Youth and Eldorado, "California or Bust," ending poverty and discrimination with New Deals and Great Societies, making the Serbs and the Muslims lie down together in Peaceable Kingdom, getting in the "command seat" of a four-ton sports utility vehicle for a trip to Disney Land.

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The social democratic city

FRED SIEGEL

IN 1950, three years after Jackie Robinson had broken in with the Dodgers, and well before the rest of the country had begun to face up to the issue of racial integration, New York's City College (CCNY) basketball team became a symbol of urban harmony. In Madison Square Garden, the site of the city's numerous political rallies for the Communist Party, the CIO, Negro freedom, and other left-wing causes, the CCNY team won victory after victory. The team, composed almost entirely of the children of the city's Jewish and black working class, went on to defeat the all-white University of Kentucky squad to win the national championship. Coach Nat Holman and his players became local and national heroes. The neighborhoods of New York celebrated the victory as a vindication of the city's ideal of social solidarity. This was surely New York at its best, a model for the nation.

A year later, college basketball and CCNY were rocked by a point-shaving scandal. At the behest of bookies, the players had not thrown games but had deliberately altered the margin of victory. Here was the other side of New York, the city of hustlers, con men, mobsters, and low lifes. New Yorkers did not respond by lamenting how a bunch of thugs had exploited the CCNY boys. Instead, they collectively declared that the players had "betrayed us," "they had let us down."

New York in the 1950s—captured in the image of Willie Mays playing stickball in the streets of the Bronx—seemed to represent the best that a left-wing political culture had to offer: equality, racial harmony, civic-mindedness, and democratic politics. The reality since then, however, has been an ideological brand of politics that has turned the very ideal of solidarity on its head. The social-democratic political fabric of the forties and fifties was shredded in the 1960s by the New Left, which weakened the city's economy and traded racial progress for polarization. And in the decades since, through the 1990s, Giuliani notwithstanding,

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the city has become the locus of a new, postmodern form of militant politics. Almost all of the many new books on New York revel in the glory of the postwar city and its social-democratic ideal. None of them, however, explain how and why that ideal broke down and what happened when it did.

Social democracy

The turn leftward in Western European politics at the end of World War II largely did not happen in the United States. Instead, the war restored America's faith in big business and in the nation's exceptional role as a defender of freedom throughout the world. Likewise, the long-standing American fear of big government limited the size and scope of New Deal programs. But postwar New York was another story. Mayor Fiorello La Guardia called for a permanent New Deal; his goal was to make New York a living example of social democracy. (In the early 1940s, while the United States and the Soviet Union were allied in the war against fascism, a trade delegation from the Soviet Union, dressed in its diplomatic finery, visited Mayor La Guardia. The New York mayor looked at the Soviet diplomats, then at his own baggy pants and frayed shirt, and declared: "Gentleman, I represent the proletariat.")

La Guardia drew great support for his social-democratic project from a public that still vividly remembered the Great Depression and the struggle against European fascism. Moreover, decades of immigration restrictions meant that the city had not been roiled by the massive arrival of new immigrants. Assimilation had proceeded to the point where most of the city's multi-ethnic residents thought of themselves as New Yorkers. And following La Guardia, they were committed to an urban, New Deal-style politics that expanded the scope of government and regulated business for the "public good," which usually meant the good of the working class.

In the 1930s a joke made the rounds that New York was the one part of the Soviet Union where open debate was possible. In reality, New York was a left-wing version of the New Deal. "There's no need talking about Leninism, Trotskyism, and other theories and theoreticians," explained Sidney Hillman, the head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and a force in New York politics. "Organized labor represents the hard core around which all progressive action must be built. But it (labor) has no program and objectives which are not shared by the great majority of forward-looking Americans."

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Joshua Freeman's *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since WWII*,† picks up the story in 1945. With London, Paris, and Berlin left devastated by the war, New York stood at perhaps the peak of its power. Yet it was still something of a nineteenth-century city, frozen in time by the Depression and its aftermath; a city where pot bellied stoves for heating and ice blocks for refrigeration were still common. It was also a city honeycombed by unions large and small, from the Russian Bath Rubbers to the Wholesale Paint Salesmen. Three weeks after the war ended, one of the smaller unions, the elevator operators, went on strike. And thanks to a show of solidarity by the city's 250,000 garment workers, the elevator operators won highly favorable terms that ended up costing the city some $100 million.

Strikes by telegraph operators, truckers, bakers, motion-picture projectionists, meat packers, dock workers, and most devastating of all, the tug boat operators, soon followed. At a time when there were no pipelines connecting New York to the Texas oil fields and well before the nation had begun importing large amounts of oil from abroad, the tug boat operators delivered 65 percent of the city's coal and 95 percent of its fuel oil. When the strike hit, Mayor William O'Dwyer, who was mayor from 1945 to 1950, closed the public schools, ordered homes to be kept at 60 degrees, shut the restaurants and theaters, and eventually brought the city through what the *New York Times* called "the most drastic disruption in the city's life since the Civil War draft riots."

O'Dwyer is a fascinating figure, who Freeman unfortunately slights. A fervent left-wing New Dealer, O'Dwyer governed as if the return of the Depression was imminent. "The country," he warned, "is in the midst of a titanic struggle between those who believe in the people's welfare and those who believe in big business and special privilege." He won reelection in 1949 because of his boast that he had held off economic collapse by building a new school and a new housing project in every month of his first term. A year later, his connections with a variety of Italian mob figures—from Albert Anastasia to Frank Costello—came under scrutiny, and he resigned suddenly to become President Truman's ambassador to Mexico. (Such ties to the mob were not uncommon, especially among left-wing politicians. As Daniel Bell once noted, one reason that urban machines could take left-wing stances is that they often al-

† New Press. 480 pp. $35.00.

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lowed the mob to finance their campaigns rather than becoming beholden to "moneyed interests.")

Freeman does a better, if at times contradictory, job describing the city's first left-wing civil war between the Communist and the anti-Communist Left. (The second civil war, of course, would come in the 1960s.) A man of the Left himself, Freeman clearly admires the militant tactics of the Communists, especially in the struggle for black freedom. Perhaps because of this sympathy, the book breaks new ground when it describes how the Communists, once defeated, became part of the New York Left. "Once ties to Stalinism became unacceptable," he notes, "many of the Communist Party militants were quickly reintegrated back into the left-wing of the labor movement." The upshot, according to Freeman, was that even at the height of the Cold War, the Communist Party Left and the anti-Communist liberals "put forth similar positions on most domestic issues like national health insurance, rent control and federal aid to education," civil rights, and cultural pluralism.

The problem, however, is that Freeman takes a somewhat limited view of the fight between the Communists and anti-Communists when he claims that this struggle was only "nominally" over ideology; it was really a "local struggle for jobs, political influence, and cultural hegemony." The reality, which has become ever more apparent over time, is that the city's "Marxism" was based not on the common experience of work in massive mills, mines, and factories but on an ideological view of politics as ceaseless struggle. It was based on the belief, as one union official put it, that "our food bills are not a solely economic but also a political matter" subject to militant action, often along ethnic lines. In practical terms, this ideological brand of politics asserted itself in widespread price controls. Wartime rent controls, which sometimes kept landlord incomes below the price needed to maintain their property, were made permanent. Similarly, after the city took over the once private subway lines, fares were kept at a nickel even though that meant that repairs were either delayed or ignored.

Once this ideological civil war was over, the largely reunited Left began to remake New York in its own image. The city, says Freeman, had a "hybrid form of municipal social democracy ... that included state action, an ever increasing range of services provided directly by unions, and huge labor linked (housing) co-operatives and service organizations." Many of the achievements were impressive. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the United Housing

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Federation (UHF) pioneered the development of co-operative housing for workers, and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) led the way in public housing. In health, the ILGWU was similarly in the forefront. Its first health clinic was established in 1913, and its first group-health benefits plan was created in 1939. The city, led by La Guardia, offered the first prepaid Health Insurance Plan (HIP) in 1944. Altogether, public housing, new public services, and rising wages dramatically improved the lot of the working class in the 1950s—even if in the swarm of acronyms workers sometimes lost sight of the private-sector economic growth that made it all possible.

The rise of militancy

If Freeman had ended his account with the early 1960s, *Working Class New York* would have been a strong candidate for the shortlist of essential books on New York in the twentieth century. New York's social democracy was based on a balance of mutuality and militancy. But just as the city fell apart in the late 1960s, so does the book. Freeman misses or ignores how in the mid 1960s and early 1970s the Left abandoned the ideal of mutuality in favor of militance—how it degenerated from the politics of civic reciprocity to the politics of confrontation and struggle.

The Co-Op City story is just one example of how the Left's relentless militants turned against their own institutions. This vast housing complex in the Bronx, begun by Nelson Rockefeller and Robert Moses, was built by Abraham Kazan of the United Housing Foundation (UHF), which had been building cooperative projects since the 1920s. But by the 1960s, the solidarity fostered by depression and war was weakening, and the Co-Op city residents, overtaken by the "idea that rents are political," extended the class struggle into the homes they owned in common. Led by the Maoist Charles Rosen, a group of militants encouraged tenants to go on a prolonged rent strike. When the UHF was forced to withdraw and hand the development over to New York State, Rosen celebrated the phyrric victory by announcing "we beat the bastards." It marked the beginning of decades of financial struggles for the tenants and the end of the city's co-operative housing tradition.

The irony eludes Freeman, who is much enamored of militancy and the notion that "power could be found in the streets." Even in retrospect, Freeman is heartened by the Harlem riots

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of 1963 and 1964, which he sees as the signs of "a rebirth of mass politics." They were also, he fails to note, a sign of the explosion in crime that would tear the city apart and push even those who didn't want to leave to the suburbs.

Freeman's chapters on the 1960s are less history than pamphleteering. Crucial elements in the decline of the city's social democracy—the explosion in violent crime, the enormous expansion of the welfare rolls, the collapse of the public schools—are ignored. We get, instead, an account that praises the city's social-welfare workers and their 1965 strike for higher salaries for themselves and higher benefits for welfare recipients. But there is literally not a word on how or why in a rapidly growing economy, with New York's unemployment rate at 4 percent or less, the welfare rolls roughly doubled to one million between 1965 and 1970. Leaving aside the calamitous long-term effects of this growth in welfare on those it was supposed to help, this remarkable expansion also harmed the city's social fabric. It intensified the widespread sense among the white working class that the city's social contract was being violated.

Mayor John Lindsay's effort to recruit new people onto the welfare rolls baffled many. His welfare commissioner Mitchell Ginsburg announced, rather elusively, that he had "always viewed the cost of welfare to be whatever it is," and so taxes were raised but not to meet the harshness of the business cycle. The goal was a welfare-state society. The working class themselves—white and black—could not understand why the city's elites would encourage welfare over work. "Pulling ones own weight," explained the residents of working-class Canarsie to sociologist Jonathan Reider, "was a natural complement to a co-operative society in which all shouldered their burdens."

Race war

The race issue also loomed large in the political ecology of the city. The black leaders of the early 1960s, like the Reverend Milton Galamison, were right to decry the exclusion of blacks from positions in the fire department and the skilled construction trades. But such exclusion was by then the exception, not the rule. New York, which had a successful civil rights movement long before the rest of the country, was nonetheless described by Galamison and others as "upsouth." The violent, winner-take-all politics of the deep South migrated to New York—with tragic results.

On no issue was black militance more destructive than edu-

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cation. Contrary to the claims of many black leaders (and sympathetic historians like Freeman), the city's attempt to integrate the schools was defeated less by racism than by the massive wave of black in-migration and the movement of upwardly mobile whites to the suburbs. Galamison, who sent his son to a private school, insisted that he "would rather see it [the public school system] destroyed" than retreat from the goal of total integration. He got his wish. At a time when violence inside the schools was already rising at a frightening rate, Galamison introduced the threat of violence to the very political demonstrations that were meant to save the schools.

The Ocean-Hill Brownsville experiment—which created what were essentially black nationalist schools—is perhaps the most tragic example of the destructive nature of left-wing militance. The experiment began as an initiative by the Ford Foundation and the United Federation of Teachers to give black neighborhoods greater control over their schools. But when the local superintendent, Rhody McCoy, a follower of both Malcolm X and the Afro-fascist Marcus Garvey, fired a group of white teachers, the experiment provoked a series of strikes that divided the city.

The sin of the white teachers was not that they were racist in any conventional sense. The Teachers Union, long a part of labor-left politics in New York, had been an active supporter of both the civil rights movement in the South and black causes in New York. Their failing, according to the black nationalists of McCoy's district, was that they supported an "integrationist curriculum" designed to bring children a half generation removed from the backwoods of the American South into New York's economic mainstream. The teachers were intimidated and beaten by students who received their marching orders from the thuggish Sonny Carson. (The mayhem was an inspiration for the young Al Sharpton.)

Neither the *New York Times* nor Mayor Lindsay, both perhaps enthralled by the militants, were at the time willing to acknowledge or criticize the use of violence. Freeman has no such excuse, yet he too ignores it. The end result of the strikes, and the confrontations that followed, is that New York's excellent public school system fell apart, and remains to this day in a horrible shambles. The fall of City College soon followed, as the threat of violence brought an end to entrance requirements, flooding the college with ill-prepared students.

In the name of remedying racism, institutions that had enabled the white working class to rise, and might have accom-

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plished something of the same for blacks, were torn apart one by one. Under the best of circumstances, absorbing a vast population of new arrivals, even had they been white, would have been extremely difficult. But in almost every case, the militant's cures for the city's racism proved worse than the disease.

The "dual city"

Public-sector unions did to the economy what political radicals did to the public schools. Beginning in 1958, when Mayor Wagner granted city employees the right to unionize, the militants who once went after private businesses now targeted the city treasury. For all of its social-democratic institutions, New York had kept costs and hence taxes in check. But in 1961, once Wagner became dependent on the municipal unions for re-election, the age of relative fiscal restraint ended. Government employment grew from 347,000 in 1950, to 408,000 in 1960, then to 563,000 in 1970. Between 1966 and 1970 alone, the number of public-sector jobs grew by 92,000; four-fifths of all new jobs in that period were in government. By 1970, Freeman notes, "there were more employees in city government than the garment, banking and longshore industries put together." As the number of government workers grew, their militancy intensified. Freeman proudly describes the late 1960s and early 1970s as the golden age of strikes. In "strike city," transit workers, teachers, sanitation men, Metropolitan Opera performers, and postal workers all walked out, while the police and firemen engaged in threats and slowdowns.

La Guardia, who pledged decades earlier to make New York a "one hundred percent union" town and was the first to project a civic vision of the worker's city, nonetheless had doubts about public-employee unions. "I do not want any of the pinochle club atmosphere to take hold," he exclaimed. City workers, he hoped, would be the people's workers; they would set an example of dedicated public service which those in the private sector would admire. Had he been alive, La Gaurdia no doubt would have been horrified when in 1971 labor leaders Barry Feinstein and Victor Gotbaum instructed workers at New York's waste-treatment facilities to walk off their job, allowing raw sewage to pour into the city's waterways.

"There is no question about it," Gotbaum boasted, "we (the municipal labor leaders) have the ability to elect our own boss." They voted themselves more money and shorter hours,

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which combined with the vast expansion of the welfare rolls, drove taxes up and business out of New York. The city during this period lost 35 percent of its manufacturing and 16 percent of its overall jobs, roughly 700,000 in all.

The collapse of manufacturing in the 1970s meant the end of New York's white working class, as more than a million fled the city during that decade. What remained was the "dual city" much decried by leftist critics like Freeman. In the dual city, there are two primary types of employment: high-end business jobs, like financial services (which much to Freeman's regret had avoided unionization and were able to weather the city's high costs), and the vast array of low-skill and often public-sector jobs that employ the bulk of the black and Latino working class. It is, in other words, a city irreconcilably divided along class and racial lines, which the politics of liberation exacerbates, feeds off, and promises never to resolve.

Postmodern city

The most recent books on politics in New York show that the militance of the 1960s lives on, if in somewhat altered form. In an essay in *Re-Presenting the City*,† Saskia Sassen transposes the class struggle into contemporary "contestations" over space. Displaying a remarkable ability to sniff out class conflict in the most unlikely places, she finds it in the clash between lower-middle-class and upper-middle-class shoppers on 14th Street. In Janet Abu-Lughod's book, *America's Global Cities*,‡ the class struggle is similarly given a spatial interpretation. This latest variation on an old Marxist theme not surprisingly gets the story exactly backward. Abu-Lughod argues that New York's welfare state has fallen victim to the new oppressive geography of international finance. Actually, it's the wealth of the financial-services sector that funds the city's vast array of social services.

Samuel Delany, in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*,‡‡ sees a contemporary class war in "the structure of discourse." A student of Marx and Foucault, Delany sees gay casual sex in 42d Street movie theaters as the source of interclass healing and as the quintessence of democracy. The author celebrates the "Midnight Cowboy" days as the city's finest and attacks redevelopment as a capitalist plot against homosexuals.

† New York University Press. 282 pp. $50.00.

‡ University of Minnesota Press. 580 pp. $39.95.

‡‡ New York University Press. 208 pp. $19.95.

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These authors, like New York's militant activists, are in search of a substitute proletariat. Neither the one nor the other has come to grips with the failed policies of the 1960s. And so despite its failures, the politics of militancy and liberation continued in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the Coalition for the Homeless, inspired by the "success" of the campaign to expand the welfare rolls in the 1960s, tried to duplicate that feat in the 1980s. They presented drug and alcohol-addicted "homeless" New Yorkers as hard-working average folks who had lost their apartments after being downsized by heartless corporations. The aim, as in the 1960s, was a vast expansion of social-service programs and public housing; and the means, as in the 1960s, were violent protests. If these needs were not met, warned advocate Jonathan Kozol, riots were imminent. "This many poor families, mothers, fathers and children," he intoned, "are not going to remain silent and passive forever. There is an enormous anger building up in these shelters and the streets." The effort, not surprisingly, was based on bogus facts and flawed ideology; and, not surprisingly, it did not help the people it was supposed to. In the 1990s, the sort of anger Kozol referred to burst open again along racial lines with riots in Washington Heights and Crown Heights.

When the young and idealistic Evan Mandery signed on as the research director for Ruth Messinger's mayoral campaign against Rudy Giuliani in 1997, he was surprised to discover that "the idea of addressing New Yorkers as citizens with potentially common public interests, rather than as members of various constituencies (blacks, gays, Latinos), seems to have been vacuumed out of today's Democratic Party in the city." In his book, *The Campaign: Rudy Giuliani, Ruth Messinger, Al Sharpton, and the Race to be Mayor of New York*,† Mandery notes that while Messinger is nominally a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, she is really an heir to the militant traditions of the 1960s, when race became the "Rosetta Stone" of city politics. Mandery quotes Jim Andrews, the veteran political consultant who ran the Messinger campaign, on the real meaning of Giuliani's effort to clear the bridge and tunnel entrances of aggressive panhandlers: "He was telling every white person in New York City that he was going to close the sluice gates at 125th Street. Rudy was saying that he was going to make sure that they stay where they belong—up in Harlem and the Bronx." Race, Andrews concluded, "isn't just part of politics, it is politics."

† Westview. 384 pp. $27.00.

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Mandery spends much of the book expressing his admiration, despite some doubts, for Al Sharpton, who nearly forced Messinger into a run-off for the Democratic nomination. The basis of the doubts are clear enough: Sharpton is a racial demagogue, who polarized the city over a false accusation of rape in the Tawana Brawley hoax. After that, Sharpton and his aide Morris Powell, an escaped mental patient, helped incite the murder of eight people on 125th Street in the name of driving "white interlopers" out of Harlem. But like Messinger, Mandery swallows his doubts about Sharpton, who after his defeat for the Democratic nomination tried to shake down the Messenger campaign as the price of his endorsement. Sharpton carries on the tradition of militant protest, which is why he is so appealing and so untouchable. He "fights the power"; he leads the black struggle for liberation; and so he remains sacrosanct no matter what he does.

Not like America

New York is today a city without a civic ideal, except that which is occasionally imposed by the brute force of Giuliani's personality. New York's activists, who like to talk, as does Freeman, of the city's "exceptionality," were enraged when Giuliani spoke of the need to make New York "more like the rest of America." For Giuliani, this was a recognition of the city's failed political tradition. But for New York's union leaders, demagogues, and liberal elites, it was a betrayal of what Mario Cuomo called "the New York idea."

In his most despairing moments, Mandery wonders if Giuliani hasn't "changed the very nature of New York politics." He needn't worry. Giuliani may have solved some of the city's most serious problems—or at least made some progress. But there is no end in sight to New York's long, unfortunate love affair with the politics of race and class struggle. New York's dysfunctional political culture, the bastard heir of a once great civic tradition, shows no sign of reforming itself. This "long strange trip"—as Ruth Messinger called politics in New York, quoting rock-and-roll icons the Grateful Dead—continues to hurt the very people it claims to liberate, and promises to leave New York's greatest problems unsolved and unsolvable.

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The trouble with Fish

WILLIAM A. GALSTON

Socrates: The rhetorician and his rhetoric will have the same relation to all the other arts: there is no need for rhetoric to know the facts at all, for it has hit upon a means of persuasion that enables it to appear, in the eyes of the ignorant, to know more than those who really know.

Gorgias: Well, Socrates, isn't that a delightfully easy way of doing things: to make oneself a match for the experts in the other arts, though one has learned none of them, only this one?

(*Plato*, Gorgias, *459*)

IN his latest book, *The Trouble with Principle*,† Stanley Fish claims to be an heir to the classical tradition of rhetoric. His self-proclaimed antecedents are the pre-Socratics, the rhetorics of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, the politics of Castiglione and Hobbes, the pragmatism of James, Dewey, and Rorty, the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin, and, above all, the political outlook of Machiavelli. With his customary reserve, he identifies his liberal adversaries with Milton's Satan ("the authentic voice of technological modernism") and himself with Augustine.

I say "liberal adversaries" because this book is directed against liberalism, understood not in the everyday political sense of an ideology opposed to conservatism, but rather as a political philosophy that takes its stand on the existence and worth of "neutral principles," such as freedom of speech and color-blindness. Fish argues that no such principles exist, that every principle is already "inflected with substance," and that

† Harvard University Press. 328 pp. $24.95.

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the apparently inclusive liberal norms of free speech and tolerance are nothing more than rhetorical cloaks for distinctively liberal forms of hierarchy and exclusion. In particular, he insists, liberalism exalts rational inquiry over religious conviction, and the capacity for choice over the content of what is chosen. The result is a distinctive form of oppressiveness masquerading as generosity.

Let me note at the outset that Fish is right, in my view, to reject the possibility of neutral principles, to see liberal principles and institutions as promoting a distinctive ensemble of purposes, to cast doubt on the universality of the characteristic liberal commitment to secular-rational explanation and justification, and to sympathize with groups (such as Christian fundamentalists) who are affronted by educational arrangements that most liberal academics favor. For these reasons, and more, Fish is right to reject the typical liberal self-understanding as a set of practices inclusive of all ways of life.

But Fish goes seriously astray in associating this error with the totality of liberal philosophy and practice. Not all liberals believe in the possibility of neutral principles (indeed, most do not); not all are quasi-Kantians who privilege the capacity for choice over the content of what is chosen; and not all give secular rationality pride of place over revealed religion. Indeed, some liberals have espoused the understanding of liberal principles and institutions as purposive, and some have even defended the claims of Vicky Frost and her band of fundamentalist parents against the needlessly rigid stance of the Hawkins County School Board. While Fish is right to say that all regimes rest on exclusion as well as inclusion, he is wrong to suggest that all exclusions are created equal. There is a difference between Khomeini's Iran and Jefferson's America. What Hegel said of Schelling's philosophy holds true for Fish's conception of politics as coercively exclusionary: It is the night in which all cows are black.

FISH offers three broad criticisms of liberalism. First, he is somewhat resentful of the enduring force of liberal rhetoric. But, as a fervent admirer of rhetorical effectiveness in the service of political power, Fish is in no position to criticize liberals on this score. Second, Fish charges that liberals pretend to be doing something other than deploying rhetoric in the service of a political agenda. This is an odd criticism since if pretending to be doing something contributes to effectiveness, then from Fish's perspective, why not pretend? His real

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objection to liberalism is his last: that when liberals aren't self-consciously pretending to be neutral but actually take their stance seriously, they often find themselves unable to pursue their own objectives and end up serving the enemy, willy-nilly.

As evidence for this charge, Fish adduces the debate over affirmative action, a policy he strongly favors. He is intensely frustrated by the inability of many liberals to answer those conservatives who base their anti-affirmative-action arguments on the principle of color-blindness. His suggestion: "Argue that civil rights supporters were not working for a colorblind society (even though it may have been rhetorically effective to use that language) but for better conditions for African Americans."

This is a fair sample of Fish's rhetorical modus operandi, and of its shortcomings. In the first place, it is very difficult to improve the well-being of a part of society unless one can link that improvement to some understanding of justice or the common good held by the dominant forces in that society. The idea that skin-color is not relevant to the enjoyment of the rights and privileges of citizenship, including the right to compete for economic and social advancement, cuts very deep for Americans. That is why one of the strongest arguments (if it is empirically sustainable) for affirmative action is that such a race-conscious policy is a necessary, but temporary, step on the road to eventual color-blindness. (Similarly, Fish labors under the illusion that he can mount an effective defense of academic freedom as a self-interested "guild practice" while debunking the public-regarding arguments that academics typically offer the public. The frank admission of self-interest is more amusing than persuasive. Fish habitually chooses the self-indulgent course of shocking the bourgeoisie over the self-disciplined obfuscation that is—from his own standpoint—needed for effective persuasion.)

A second weakness, one that Fish seems unaware of, is that abandoning or contradicting particular public justifications when they become inconvenient has consequences: To say one thing in one context and the opposite in another opens oneself to the charge of manipulation, cynicism, and hypocrisy—unless one is unusually skillful in covering one's tracks. In like manner, to announce a general standard and then apply it selectively undermines the credibility of both standard and speaker.

Fish adverts to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, but he doesn't seem to have read Aristotle very carefully. At the beginning of his exposition, Aristotle defines rhetoric as the capacity of discov-

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ering the possible means of persuasion with regard to all subjects. The particular means a speaker may employ (of which the number is indefinitely large) fall into just three broad categories, of which the first is "ethos"—that is, character. The speaker persuades through character when his speech renders him worthy of confidence or trust. It is hard to see how the Fishian position that one may argue either "X" or "not-X" as circumstances dictate could be consistent with maintaining the confidence of one's audience. It is even harder to see how the teacher of rhetoric (and that's what Fish is) can be trusted once he publicly acknowledges that he teaches his students to use words as weapons rather than claims to validity or truth. That is why Gorgias, under heavy pressure from Socrates, is forced to claim that he teaches his students justice as well as rhetoric. And that is why Protagoras, who was intensely aware of the suspicion aroused by the art of rhetoric, begins by insisting that he teaches his students not only public persuasion but also good citizenship. As a professed student of Machiavelli, Fish makes no such effort, and therefore it is difficult to see why a reader of his book would trust any efforts of persuasion that he or his students might undertake.

I DO not wish to suggest that Fish's position can be reduced to its self-undermining rhetorical stance, for it has a philosophical core that needs to be taken seriously. One element of that core—directly bearing on Fish's rejection of formal principles—is the proposition that all action is purposive and can only be judged with reference to its purposes, and similarly for institutions and practices. More simply, actions are not only means to ends but gain their moral quality from the ends. More simply still, the ends, and only the ends, justify the means.

Fish does not argue for, but merely proclaims, a remarkably crude consequentialism without even trying to deal with the obvious objections. Consider the theory of justice in the conduct of war. This theory invokes the principle of noncombatant immunity as a constraint on the tactics that combatants (regardless of the justice of their cause) may rightly employ. From this perspective, it is not enough to say, "We are opposing aggression, and therefore we may target noncombatant civilians whenever it is militarily useful." The reason is this: Military tactics are not just neutral instruments that take on the moral quality of the purposes for which they are used; they have moral qualities of their own. On occasion, a tension

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may develop between ends and means; in extreme cases, the achievement of a just end may depend on the employment of unjust means. There is no algorithm to resolve this dilemma. The point is that it is a genuine moral dilemma, not (as Fish would have it) a weak-minded or sentimental misunderstanding. By analogy, if it sometimes proves necessary to set aside the principle of color-blindness, it is not unreasonable to experience a measure of moral regret.

If the end justifies the means, what justifies the end? This is a crucial question for Fish, because from the beginning of this book to the end he urges political combatants to abandon all recourse to abstract principles and make direct "policy" arguments for the ends they pursue. The short answer is that, for Fish, *nothing* justifies the ends we seek. We have "policy desires," and we craft principles and theories *post hoc* to lend a tincture of justification for these desires and to aid in their attainment. But not to worry, Fish assures us. This doesn't mean that our norms are ungrounded; only that they are "not grounded in anything outside or independent of the complex of reasons, evidence, assumptions, goals, imperatives, ranked values, preferred outcomes, and so on, which, because it is the content of your consciousness, is determinative of what you see and what you will take to be the obviously right course of action in a particular situation."

Much "confusion," Fish adds, has resulted from failing to see that the absence of "independent" normative justifications is not the same as saying that there are no normative justifications at all. Count me among the confused. I had always thought that the need for normative justification arises from the fact of disagreement among individuals—in Fish's language, from the differences among individuals in the content of consciousnesses. To equate, as Fish does, normative justification with the content of each individual consciousness is to say, in effect, that we are justifying ourselves only to ourselves, or to others who already agree with us about the matter at hand. But that hardly seems necessary, and it isn't the point.

THE alleged absence of independent normative justifications is more than a theoretical difficulty; it has real (and pernicious) consequences for Fish's account of politics. For example, he contends that "there is no such thing as hate speech, if you mean by that designation speech that would be judged hateful by an *independent* norm. Instead, there is speech that is hateful to some persons because it offends the ideals to

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which they pledge allegiance." It follows that if I happen not to pledge allegiance to racial equality and civil rights, I can use racial or ethnic slurs with a clear conscience, and there's no contrary independent principle to which reason says I should subscribe.

More generally, Fish argues, "the normative is inside the political process, where it is a prize and not a given." And so, while writers who have been coercively silenced may condemn a regime as "tyrannical," that is merely an act performed within their own perspective; presumably the regime would not accept such a designation. And who is to judge between them? But are we really content to say, as evidently Fish is, that Hitler and Stalin were tyrants only because we "frame" it that way? Do we really have no independent standard for judging between tyrants and their victims?

As it happens, Fish does have a preferred politics, summarized in Rodney King's memorably plaintive question: "Can't we all just get along?" The fancy name for this uneasily peaceful coexistence is modus vivendi. We cannot keep deep disagreement out of the public realm, Fish insists, but it is possible to keep conflict at bay by allowing for the give and take of shifting alliances. We can never reach a principled, universally binding resolution of our differences, but "we may be able to figure out a way for *these* [particular] differences to occupy the civic and political space of *this* [particular] community without coming to blows." Perhaps so. But why prefer civil peace to civil war? Especially after one has written an entire book questioning the moral seriousness of persons who "[value] peace and fellowship more than they value the convictions in whose name they [are] fighting"?

BUT perhaps Fish is, in the end, a liberal *malgre lui*, retracing without quite knowing it the steps that led to the first crystallization of liberal politics. Locke's doctrine of religious toleration was not invented in a philosophical vacuum. It emerged in the wake of bloody wars of religion that led many Christians to wonder whether the forcible suppression of religious differences was compatible with the requirements of Christian morality. Rather than suggesting a lack of moral commitment, toleration reflected a deeply moral impulse within Christianity, one which rejected the proposition that all means are permitted in the name of propagating faith. Hobbes takes his place within the origins of liberalism because in secular language he argues for peace over war. It is hardly surprising

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that modern antiliberalism is almost always liberalism with a minus sign—that is, a doctrine of war rather than peace. Fish criticizes liberal principles while embracing the essentials of liberal politics. But he has no basis for his preference.

Fish is untroubled by this fact. "Politics is all there is," he declares. "Principles and abstractions don't exist except as the rhetorical accompaniments of practices in search of good public relations.... The assertion of interest is always what's going on even when, and especially when, interest wraps itself in high-sounding abstractions." How on earth does Fish know this? Here's his answer: "Politics is only necessary or possible when there are contending visions of the good and no God ... to decide between them." And that is in fact "the human condition." In other words, Fish knows that there is nothing except politics because he knows that there is no God whose word is the truth and the way. But how does he know that?

Fish traces his understanding of rhetoric to Protagoras, who was famous for two pronouncements: "About the gods I cannot say either that they are or that they are not," and "Man is the measure of all things." If one is serious about the first of these pronouncements, one cannot embrace the second: If it is possible that the gods exist, then it is possible that man is not, after all, the measure of all things. To affirm the human as the final arbiter, one must go beyond Protagoras' professed agnosticism to outright atheism. That is, one must make exactly the kind of universalistic claim to Truth that Fish affirms even while denying its possibility.

EVEN without reaching these kinds of epistemological or theological questions, there is good reason to be skeptical of Fish's claims. For we are forced to ask, what is the status of the proposition, "It's all politics"? What kind of claim does it make upon us? There are only two possibilities—first, that it is itself an abstract rhetorical claim cloaking a particular agenda or interest; or second, that it is sincerely advanced as a general truth about the human condition. If the former, then no one who pursues goals other than Fish's (and that's just about everyone) has any reason to accept the claim. And if the latter, then Fish himself is committed to the view that there are at least some truth-claims whose validity is independent of particular perspectives and interests. And if he is permitted to advance such claims, why can't liberals do the same?

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Broken streets, broken lives

JOHN J. DiIULIO, JR.

DESPITE the dawn of political correctness, we have come a long and welcome way from the days when Daniel Patrick Moynihan was excoriated as a racist and sexist for suggesting in a 1965 U.S. Department of Labor report that the rise of the female-headed "Negro family" was a burgeoning threat to black socioeconomic progress. We have even advanced from the not-too-distant days a decade ago when, having written in this journal on inner-city crime, I was scolded by liberal academic colleagues for suggesting that poor but decent blacks wanted the "truly deviant" criminals in their neighborhoods to be incarcerated.

Elijah Anderson's superb Philadelphia-focused ethnography of "the nature of public life in the inner-city ghetto" is further proof that, even on the academic Left, the era of truthful discourse about contemporary black urban life may well be here to stay. "Of all the problems besetting the poor inner-city black community," he advises in *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*,† "none is more pressing than that of interpersonal violence and aggression."

None indeed. In the mid 1990s, black males aged 14 to 24 were 1 percent of the population but 17 percent of the homicide victims and 30 percent of the homicide perpetrators. Since 1993, black homicide victimization rates have fallen by over 40 percent, but no big city has yet resolved the crisis of violence by and against young black males. Nationally, during the first half of 1999, murders in cities of more than a million residents rose by 1 percent. By the year 2006, America will be home to over 20 million teenagers of all races, the largest teen cohort since 1980, and the largest cohort of minority teens ever. Many risk factors that solid empirical research has consistently found to be associated with predatory street criminal-

† W. W. Norton. 325 pp. $25.95.

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ity have abated hardly at all. For example, boys raised in mother-only homes are about twice as likely as otherwise comparable boys to commit crimes that lead to imprisonment. About 28 percent of all children, and 70 percent of black children, who will turn 16 in 2006 were born to unwed mothers.

Anderson quotes one person in his study as follows: "You go up to Graterford (the state maximum-security prison in Philadelphia), 90 percent in that penitentiary are black." True, and no juveniles are more likely to experience child maltreatment and go on to commit or suffer extreme acts of violence than the offspring of imprisoned low-income minority males. No one knows how many brutalized inner-city boys have fathers behind bars, but we do know that, on any given day in 1998, about 1.1 million children under age 18, at least a third of them black, had a father in state prison. Thus a recent Morehouse College statement on father absence among blacks pled the need to monitor, mentor, and minister to the children, youth, and families of imprisoned inner-city black men.

THE tragic alternative is to forsake these children to what Anderson terms the "code of the street," the rules, rites, and rituals that regulate a self-destructive black urban street subculture. In this culture, hair-trigger violence is often a behavioral norm, and even cold-blooded murder can be considered morally mandated if one has not been "granted one's 'props' (or proper due) or the deference one deserves." To violate the code, wittingly or not, is to risk a severe beating or sudden death. Thus, in certain predominantly black sections of Philadelphia, knowledge of the code "is literally necessary for operating in public." That is why even many inner-city black parents with "a decency orientation," who reject outright "the values of the code," nonetheless "encourage their children's familiarity with it in order to enable them to negotiate the inner-city environment."

What Anderson poignantly describes as "the dilemma of the decent kid" is that familiarity with the code (averting stares, avoiding fights) often breeds self-contempt. "Young people who project decency," he notes, "are generally not given much respect on the streets." Typically, poor black inner-city kids who simply want to do well in school, attend proms, go to church, and work toward a better life in the future come to feel that they "must do more than make peace with the street group ... they must get cool with the people who dominate the public spaces."

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For decent black inner-city kids, seeking help or protection from nonparental neighborhood adults is not only uncool but increasingly impossible. As Anderson explains, into the 1970s, "old heads"—street savvy inner-city black men—articulated and enforced the code in ways that, while not preventing murder and mayhem in the community, generally kept the violence in check and away from decent families. Some old heads became "decent daddies," the hard-working, "principled and moral" black men who not only raised their own sons responsibly but served as surrogate fathers to "young men on street corners." The decent daddies knew that racism was a reality, but they were "intolerant of excuses," had little patience with men who failed "to meet their responsibilities as fathers or husbands," and held "individuals, not the system," responsible for social ills.

But by the mid 1990s, dinosaur displays in downtown Philadelphia museums outnumbered decent daddies on many inner-city Philadelphia streets. "Today," warns Anderson, "more and more young men are emerging from socially disorganized home situations.... Many of these young men have had limited or no personal experience with a decent daddy," and "do not even know enough about the role to miss it."

The traditional black inner-city grandmother is also becoming extinct. These mostly churchgoing women opposed the code, dismissing "structural explanations for the various social ills besetting the community, convinced that if you just act right, you will be rewarded; if you are civil and decent, you can make it." But faced with unprecedented youth violence, crack cocaine, chronic unemployment, and the near-total lack of adult male allies, "these traditional grandmothers are losing clout and energy, few of them are being replaced," and so "the impoverished pockets of the black inner-city community move closer to disintegration."

AS one moves out of the ghetto," Anderson observes, "the ratio of decent to street-oriented people improves." So, too, I might add, does the density of responsible, caring nonparental adults who are directly involved in the daily lives of toddlers and teens. Richard P. Nathan and his colleagues at SUNY-Albany have written persuasively about "the flip side of the underclass," namely, the roughly three-quarters of all urban blacks who reside in safe, sound, and civil working-class and middle-class neighborhoods.

Still, what about the poor inner-city black children who

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remain socially isolated in the poorest, most dangerous neighborhoods of Philadelphia and other cities? Anderson respects traditional grandmothers and decent daddies too much to snicker at their sermons about individual responsibility, but his own book-closing sermon is about how neither the old ladies nor the old heads can provide inner-city black youth with "jobs that pay a living wage." He also pleads, in passing, for better "political leadership" and wishes for "a viable mainstream inner-city economy" that could displace the underground economy and its "code of violence and predatory activity." Fair enough, but I would offer three practical solutions.

First, support black community-serving outreach ministries. In Philadelphia, Anderson's University of Pennsylvania colleague (and mine), Ram Cnaan, is completing the first-ever *detailed census of the entire range of human and social services* provided by big-city religious congregations. The preliminary findings suggest that inner-city faith-based organizations, from tall tower churches to storefront "blessing stations," are making ever greater strides in helping the most severely at-risk black inner-city youth to avoid violence, achieve literacy, and gain jobs. Increasingly, churches are serving as magnets for corporate and philanthropic investments in the poorest black communities. They are also expanding to citywide and even regional volunteer bases.

Second, foster multi-agency antiviolence partnerships. Two years ago, I began Philadelphia's Youth Violence Reduction Project (YVRP). The idea was to bring together the District Attorney's Office, the Philadelphia Police Department, the Probation Department, local clergy, and others in an effort to share information on the one hundred or so kids in each high-crime police district who everyone agreed were most likely to kill or be killed. The program was officially begun by former Mayor Ed Rendell in May 1998 but only in a single police district. Between 1995 and 1998, juvenile homicides in Philadelphia fell insignificantly from 167 to 157. In the first six months of the pilot, each YVRP youth got what he needed most, whether that meant drug counseling or protection from abusive adults and gangs. During that period, the YVRP police district experienced only one juvenile homicide (not a YVRP-targeted youth) compared to 11 juvenile homicides in the same six-month period of the previous year.

Third, achieve universal access to literacy programs. Recent research shows that the inability to read is a more powerful predictor of criminality and recidivism than most previous stud-

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ies had indicated. Basic literacy is required even for most low-skill jobs (and such employment has been growing, not disappearing, in the Philadelphia region). Local and national foundations will soon be pumping funds into the creation and expansion of community-based literacy programs in every impoverished neighborhood of Philadelphia. By the year 2006, Philadelphia could well be the first big city in which no low-income man, woman, or child who wants access to a high-quality literacy or reading-improvement program goes without it.

THESE solutions will not change overnight the ratio of decent to violent people in black inner-city neighborhoods. They will not bring a massive infusion of good jobs back to the central city districts where most poor blacks seek employment. They will not satisfy the quixotic conservative quest for a rebirth of the traditional two-parent black urban family. But they could reduce senseless murders, improve basic education, normalize decent social relations, and otherwise keep the code of the street from being a daily code red.

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Statesmen wanted

ADAM WOLFSON

THE philosopher Karl Löwith once pointed out that there can be no such thing as a "Christian gentleman." What he meant was that the adjective and noun in question describe two very different ideal types. The Christian is perhaps more familiar to us: His virtues are those of self-surrender, humility, charity, hope, and faith. These are, as Löwith noted, "not natural and reasonable virtues of a golden mean but radical virtues of grace." They are the virtues of a follower of Christ.

In contrast, the gentleman is a man of the world. In America, though, where most public restrooms bear the label "Gentlemen," we are likely to misunderstand its real meaning. Originally not every man who might use a public toilet, not even every man who owned some land, was considered a gentleman. Rather, leisure, wealth, and a very special education were understood to be necessary for the cultivation of gentlemen. The man of noblesse oblige is then not a product of Christianity, and certainly not of a commercial society like our own, and his particular virtues are honored in cultures as different from each other as Confucius's China and Aristotle's Greece. His virtues include moderation, generosity, magnanimity, and high-mindedness. The gentleman is, as Löwith explained, distinguished by his well-tempered manners and well-balanced disposition. He is a man of perfect self-control and self-respect.

Löwith found much in the gentleman worthy of recommendation. But he also believed that the gentleman, however admirable, lacked certain important qualities, for the flip side of the gentleman's "cultured self-respect" was a certain moral timidity:

> The self-respecting gentleman is an enemy of extravagances of all kinds. He shrinks from scenes and he does not make confessions. He always controls his temper and suppresses his emotions. He carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar in the minds of those

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> with whom he is cast. He avoids irritating topics, clashing of opinions, collision of feelings, and all those things which are regarded as out of place. He never hurts another's feelings because he himself does not want to be hurt in turn.

Jesus, Löwith noted, hardly fits this description. And judging by his recent book, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man*,† it would not fit J. Budziszewski either. The book, "a Christian reflection on the theme of politics and original sin," is confessional: Budziszewski confesses to having been at one time an atheist and a nihilist ("I was, if anything, more Nietzschean than" Nietzsche), who got caught up in the radical politics of the late 1960s and did not love his wife and children as he should have. The book does not shrink from irritating topics, especially abortion and euthanasia. It jars the mind:

> If we may kill, we may do anything—and historians will write that by the last decade of the twentieth century, great numbers of men and women in the most pampered society on the earth had come to think it normal and desirable that their sick, their weak, and their helpless should be killed.... Babies asleep in the dim of the womb were awakened by knife-edged cannulas that sucked and tore at their soft young limbs; white-haloed grandmothers with wandering minds were herded by white-smocked shepherds into the cold dark waters of death.

The book is emphatically not the work of a gentleman but of a firm Christian. The question is whether it offers an adequate response to the political and cultural problems of our day.

BROADLY speaking, the book's subject is what Budziszewski calls, in a subhead, "The Road to Hell" or why "things get worse so fast." Many readers will question Budziszewski's dire assessment of our social condition. After all, America has won the Cold War and is the sole remaining superpower; unemployment and inflation are at all time lows; the stock market is soaring and crime and abortion rates are declining; the culture wars are passé. We live in an era of Good Feelings and Getting Along. Budziszewski reminds us that not all is well. In his view, a transvaluation of values is occurring which risks turning America into a sort of laissez-aller Nazi Germany, where not only abortion but infanticide, and not only euthanasia of the consenting old but euthanasia of the protesting old and

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sick and handicapped, will in time become commonplace. What he sets out to describe is why this slide is occurring, and what might be done to arrest its development.

TO explain why things are getting worse in America, Budziszewski, a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas and frequent contributor to *First Things*, presents a compelling psychology of sin. His key insight, which might at first seem paradoxical, is that the cause of our troubles lies with the very strength of our conscience, not its weakness or absence. According to Budziszewski, there is a natural law—a law written on the human heart—which was later supplemented by the special revelations of the Old and New Testaments. But if the natural and revealed law elevates man, making him into a moral being, it can also make him much worse. Here's the rub: Since we cannot *not* know the natural law—which is, in general terms, the moral law—the effort to suppress it requires a certain amount of willful ingenuity. Indeed, in the process of suppressing the moral law we become worse than we would have otherwise been had we never known its dictates. As Budziszewski characterizes our situation:

> Pressing down one's conscience does not make it weak any more than pressing down a wildcat makes it docile. It only makes it violent. Its claws are even sharper in a culture with a Christian past, like ours, for then people have more to suppress.

Budziszewski gives many examples of how the suppression of the conscience catapults us into ever greater wrongdoing, but the paradigmatic case would seem to be abortion. Since we cannot *not* know that wanton killing—i.e., killing for the sake of convenience—is wrong, we feel compelled to justify abortion. We do so by denying the humanity of the victims (i.e., the unborn child). We call it a "fetus" and argue that it lacks rationality or independence or agency. But in the end these justifications only push us toward greater wrongdoing or sin. The psychology of the process works as follows: Before long we notice that like the fetus, six-month-olds lack rationality, the handicapped lack independence, and the senile lack agency. And so we kill them too. Budziszewski has a riposte to those interlocutors who will claim that his domino theory is too extreme, who will object, "'People are not that logical!'"

> Ah, but they are more logical than they know; they are only logical *slowly*. The implication they do not grasp today they may

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> grasp in thirty years; if they do not grasp it even then, their children will. It is happening already. Look around.

BUDZISZEWSKI writes that Christ "has redeemed even my nihilist past and put it to use." This is no doubt true and it is thus all the more interesting that his account of our condition at least superficially resembles that of his old nemesis, Nietzsche. They share, it would appear, a deep suspicion of liberal civilization. Neither sees in it a satisfying answer to the human condition. For both, it is but a rest stop on the way toward something else—"a system of moral castes more pitiless than anything the East has devised" (Budziszewski) or the superman (Nietzsche).

Budziszewski also resembles Nietzsche in that he has little use for the sort of practical politics that characterizes liberal societies. Which is to say, he has little patience for the horse-trading and compromising that liberal and conservative politicians undertake for the sake of the common good. In three short chapters, Budziszewski dispatches of communitarianism, liberalism, and conservatism, finding them all inadequate to the crisis. But his dissatisfaction with today's politics does not lead him, as it did Nietzsche, to preach the superman. "Cure, if it comes, must come from God," he asserts. And more particularly, from Jesus: "He is not parallel to any of the others. Only He claimed not to *teach* but to *be* the surgery of God."

Thus neither Budziszewski nor Nietzsche looks for answers to what Löwith identified as the gentleman—or the closest thing to it today, the statesman. Madison, Hamilton, and Lincoln best exemplify the statesman's virtues, but Teddy Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan would qualify too. Such leaders pursue the common welfare while always keeping in mind what is, and what is not, politically feasible. Their very moderation enables them, where more single-minded types fail, to direct all manners of men, with their different temperaments and goals, toward the general good.

Budziszewski's low regard for such a politics is evident in his curt dismissal of the political options of our day—mere bundles of "acute moral errors," he says—as well as in his remarks on religion in the United States. In his critique of what he calls "civil religionism," he takes President Eisenhower to task for his argument "that what the country needed was a religious foundation, but that he did not care what it was." In another context, Budziszewski faults America's Founding Fathers "for refusing to distinguish the kinds of religion whose

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exercise should be free from the kinds of religion whose exercise should not."

Certainly, Eisenhower might be faulted for the boldness with which he expressed his views on the utility of religion, any religion. One cannot utter such things too often or too loudly without undermining the thing one is attempting to conserve or make use of. And if Budziszewski's point is that some religions contribute more to the public good than others, it's a point well taken in at least one respect: In our relativistic times, almost anything might pass for the exercise of religion—even, as he notes, the releasing of nerve gas in public places. Nonetheless, the statesman can go only so far down the path of distinguishing good from bad religions without compromising larger, public goals. At his best, the statesman concerns himself not with the intricacies of the faith or sectarian differences but the decency and greatness of the republic he leads. And while he himself is beyond party labels, he recognizes how conservatism, liberalism, and communitarianism each have got hold of some part of the truth.

BUDZISZEWSKI'S book will be a wake-up call for many, and there can be little doubt that America greatly benefits by his mission and those who share it "to be sustainers of this ever-perishing world, strewers of preserving salt, apostles of common grace." But America needs more than that, even (or especially) if it is to deal with the very issues that rightly concern Budziszewski most, e.g., abortion. True, the statesman would perhaps avoid the issue were it not for the moral commitment of Christians—and that is his shortcoming. But in the end, only the statesman will be able to engage a divided and distracted public and persuade it to curtail evil practices (if not completely ban them). This is the task of the statesman, a type who is, unfortunately, in ever scarcer supply.

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Reeducating liberalism

ERIC COHEN

STEPHEN Macedo's new book on liberalism and education is tremendous for its historical scope, philosophical seriousness, and keen attention to present-day political questions. "The core claim of this book," Macedo writes, "is that diversity needs to be kept in its place." A just order, he says, cannot be taken for granted; democratic society requires a common political culture. In *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*,† Macedo looks in particular to the schools as the key institution for the inculcation and development of essential "civic virtues."

Macedo calls his political philosophy "liberalism with a spine" and "liberalism rightly understood." The problem, however, is that the kinds of diversity he seems most interested in "keeping in their place" are those traditions—biblical religion and natural law—that challenge the moral agnosticism of the age. "Liberalism rightly understood" is just a sophisticated defense of the liberalism we know—not the old liberalism of John Locke and the American Founders, which preserved a serious moral philosophy of human nature, but the new pluralist liberalism of John Rawls, which attempts to construct a "shared public morality" while leaving "philosophical ideals of life" up for grabs. The effort, despite Macedo's Herculean intelligence, fails.

On the subject of education, Macedo eventually concedes the wisdom of at least limited school reform—including vouchers for inner-city children to attend private and religious schools. But he does so grudgingly, out of utter desperation at the failure of most inner-city schools, and takes some comfort in the fact that significant reform is unlikely anytime soon. He spends most of the book arguing that public schools have a "moral advantage" in civic education, a premise that proceeds from his larger political project: to remake the nation's moral

† Harvard University Press. 343 pp. $45.00.

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communities in the liberal democratic image. His goal—the height of political wisdom, as he sees it—is a society where reasonable people disagree reasonably. It is, on the surface, all very reasonable, especially in a political age already shaped to the core by liberalism old and new. But when it comes to our most difficult moral and political questions—human cloning, abortion, sexual ethics, therapeutic drugs, assisted suicide—the new liberalism is, to use Macedo's own phrase, "morally uninspired and morally uninspiring."

MACEDO begins the book with a history of common schools and the ecumenical Protestants who built them. In a section called the "Catholic Problem," he argues that those concerned with American citizenship had good reason to fear that children educated in "authoritarian religious doctrines" may threaten the liberal democratic order. Common schools—and especially the Blaine Amendment, which attempted to ban the use of public funds in sectarian schools—aimed to solve this "problem" in a liberal, nonsectarian way. (Though, as Macedo acknowledges, anti-Catholic prejudice also had something to do with it.)

The debate over the Blaine Amendment provides a glimpse into the strange but central place of religion in American history. For even the most passionate supporters of the bill—which aimed to solidify the separation of church and state—were committed defenders of the central place of religion in American society. Senator Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, a great proponent of the amendment, declared that at the heart of public education must always be

> that pure and undefiled religion which appertains to the relationship and responsibility of man to God ... that religion which permeates all our laws, which is recognized on every sentence against crime and immorality, which is invoked in every oath ... that religion ... which sustains the pillars of our liberty.

Today, only members of the Religious Right (and perhaps neoconservatives) would make such an unequivocal defense of religion's place in the public square. By contrast, even yesterday's progressives were social conservatives by today's standards—for they seemed to recognize the fact that, as George Washington put it, "Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Macedo admires the common schoolers for taking seriously

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the eternal political problem of welding order and freedom, and Macedo himself should be admired for doing the same. Instead of religious principle or self-evident truths, however, Macedo puts his political faith in "public reason"—which he describes, rather elusively, as a "process in which all substantive commitments are provisional" but which still creates a "shared public morality" on the basis of "reasons we can share." This new way of politics, he argues, extends the principle of toleration from religious belief to "contestable philosophical ideals of life," while at the same time creating a justifiable political order that limits people's freedom for the sake of the public good. Such a society is not gratuitously hostile to religion—indeed, Macedo even admits that liberalism needs religious principles to hold democracy in check—but it bans religion and natural law from the public square; it forever brands them as "publicly unavailable," subordinating the religious and moral commitments of the faithful to the "public virtues" of mutual respect and toleration. These civic virtues, Macedo argues, are best learned in public schools.

And so even after acknowledging the superior discipline and academic achievement of many private and parochial schools, Macedo offers "fundamentalist" and morally conservative families a stern warning:

> Do people have a moral or constitutional right to opt out of reasonable measures designed to educate children toward very basic liberal virtues, because those measures make it harder for parents to pass along their religious beliefs? Surely not. To acknowledge the legitimacy of fundamentalist complaint as a matter of basic principle would overthrow reasonable efforts to inculcate core liberal values. It would provide religious fundamentalists with a right to shield their children from the fact of reasonable pluralism. Liberal civic education is bound to have the effect of favoring some ways of life or religious convictions over others. So be it.

THE question—indeed, the very thing that Macedo claims his book is meant to answer—is: What kinds of pluralism are reasonable? And here is where "public reason" enthusiasts have a serious moral, political, and historical problem—namely, their absolute privileging of the secular over the religious. For it may be that biblical religion and natural law, the very things that Rawls and Macedo want to ban from the public square (or at best tolerate grudgingly), have an important public role to play in ordering freedom in a way that is reliable, just, and worthy of the human soul.

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By contrast, in a regime where, as Macedo puts it, "truth is allowed to fend for itself," one never knows where "public reason" might lead. Take polygamy, an admittedly strange but (sadly) not ridiculous example. One can imagine how a publicly reasonable debate on polygamy might go: One group favors traditional family life; the other group seeks to balance erotic experience and social stability, and so argues for the normalization and legalization of polygamy—which was, after all, a "normal" family for a large part of the world's population, and for over a thousand years. There is a democratic give-and-take, then a stalemate between two irreconcilable "philosophical ideals of life." Liberal society, in the Rawls-Macedo view, would, one presumes, achieve a tolerable compromise by recognizing both ideals—polygamy and monogamy—and teaching these alternative lifestyles in the public schools. The good liberal in this example is the polygamist, who tolerates those who reject his lifestyle and sends his children to public school for pluralist sexual education. The monogamist, by contrast, who rejects polygamy and sends his children to private school to learn traditional morality—he is the illiberal one, who would be tolerated only as long as he does not try to impose his monogamist morals on others.

For now, the institution of marriage remains a union of two people, if not necessarily, given the recent court decision in Vermont, a union only between a man and a woman. Such monogamous marriages remain, in the popular imagination, a unique and necessary good for society and for individuals, though this is becoming less and less true both as a matter of belief and practice. Polygamy, by contrast, is still taboo, illegal, and "unreasonable." And yet, many things that were once taboo—from teaching masturbation in school to abortion on demand, from the belief that children don't need married mothers and fathers but just some combination of loving adults to the view that pedophilia is not necessarily harmful to children, from doctor-assisted killing to borderline pornography on network television—all these now have a serious place at the political and cultural table. This is, in a nutshell, the story of modern, withering liberalism—the infusion, normalization, and ultimate triumph of the unimaginable.

Macedo's greatest fear is that a society remade in the liberal democratic image will be boring—a place where everything is possible because nothing matters, which would detract from the clash of ideals pluralist liberals so admire. Such a society is not too difficult to imagine: a go-along and get-along

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place, with enough wealth and opportunity so that special claims (like affirmative action or personal injury lawsuits) don't offend too badly; enough therapists, antidepressants, and evening sitcoms to domesticate despair; enough day-care centers so that parents can fulfill themselves without feeling guilty about their children; enough sex education and birth control for sex without consequences. It may be that such a society can not only exist but prosper, at least for a while. But it is not a place to be proud of, and certainly not one that inspires men and women to the better angels of their natures. It is, instead, a society of anxious individuals who cling to their absolute right to self-determination, all the while wondering why they are so unhappy, so desperate, so comfortable but empty.

IN the end, Macedo presents America with a false choice: between diversity zealots, whom he rejects, and self-conscious moral pluralists like himself—self-conscious because they know that freedom needs order and that diversity needs justifiable limits. But the real political choice is somewhat different, though it is in fact a choice between two different kinds of liberals: pluralist liberals (Macedo being one of the wisest among them) and orthodox liberals.

Pluralist liberals believe that there are no incontestable, self-evident truths about man—he is merely the seeker, the adventurer, the self-creator—but that some political morality is necessary to preserve moral neutrality and prevent chaos. Orthodox liberals, by contrast, believe that human beings are bound by moral truths that they can know through reason and experience. They also recognize that man is fallible—and that while he can know what is moral, he may not know for certain the ultimate meaning of morality. Such liberals, in the tradition of Locke and Jefferson, Washington and Hamilton, recognize that peace demands both tolerable compromises and religious tolerance, and that the height of moral and political wisdom is to know which compromises are tolerable and which are not.

In short, the essential conflict in American society today—the culture war, as James Davison Hunter calls it—is between those who still believe in a version of the good life and those who believe only in the good liberal pluralist life. They are not one and the same, and while tolerance and peaceful disagreement are high virtues, it is hard to believe that they are the highest virtues.

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The right choice for schools

MARK GERSON

ONE of the many interesting facts brought forth in Joseph Viteritti's *Choosing Equality: School Choice, the Constitution and Civil Society*† is that the first comprehensive case for school vouchers was articulated by Milton Friedman in 1955. Almost a half century after Friedman made his radical case, its central idea is now widely accepted by thoughtful people on the Right and the Left. Nearly all Republicans and increasing numbers of Democrats are in favor of the government providing vouchers that enable poor children to attend private, public, or parochial schools. The precise form that an individual voucher program will take remains a source of debate and discussion, but matters of legislative execution always vary from locale to locale. The fact remains that the intellectual debate over the merit and justice of vouchers is over—and this would have been impossible to predict only five years ago.

The battle for school vouchers has been fought by an army remarkable for its eclecticism. Its generals have been commercial men such as Ted Forstmann, John Kirtley, and Richard Gilder; mayors such as Andrew Young, Bret Schundler, and John Norquist; clergymen such as Brother Bob Smith and the Reverend Floyd Flake; nonprofit leaders such as Michael Joyce and Clint Bolick; and countless parents, teachers, and legislators. Suffice it to say that no reform movement in America has ever drawn from a more diverse array of leaders.

When school choice takes its proper place in the history of American reform movements, those people will be the heroes—and Joseph Viteritti's book will be a key text. *Choosing Equality* provides a rigorous, systematic, and comprehensive case for school choice. It is hard to think of an argument for choice that he does not explain thoroughly or an argument against it that he does not refute definitively. By explaining

† Brookings. 352 pp. $29.95.

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the issues around vouchers, from constitutionality to costs, from history to bureaucracy, from the insufficiency of charter schools to the service that Catholic schools render the poorest students, Viteritti has produced an invaluable chronicle.

THE story of how the debate over choice ended is an instructive bit of intellectual psychology. Since Milton Friedman, advocates of school choice have made the point that education would improve if the public school monopoly faced the same market mechanisms that are so prevalent in private enterprise. If competition can improve everything from telecommunications to utilities, why not the public school system? This argument never got very far simply because the same conservatives who believed in Friedman's argument were the *most prone to support capitalism. An argument from capitalist* first principles would never work with liberals, who historically have at best only tolerated capitalism—and largely because there existed a public sphere free of its influence. So long as the pro-voucher case was fought with weapons drawn from the armory of efficiency, the case would not be won. As Irving Kristol wrote 25 years ago in a different context, "Efficiency is not a moral virtue and by itself never legitimizes anything."

The far better arguments for school choice are the ones Viteritti emphasizes—arguments from justice. The simple fact about choice—and its political irony—is that conservatives want to use government money to provide poor children with the same kinds of choices enjoyed by rich children, and many liberals oppose that. After all, middle-class and wealthy kids already have school choice: Their parents can respond to a failing public school system by writing a check to a private or parochial school. As Polly Williams, the Democrat Wisconsin legislator who has been one of the staunchest champions of school choice, asks: How can Jesse Jackson oppose school choice for poor kids in her district while sending his own children to private school? The irony of liberals objecting to spending government money to provide poor children with educational opportunities akin to those enjoyed by wealthy children is too rich to withstand honest scrutiny.

Unable to argue from equality, school-choice opponents respond that voucher programs "skim" the best kids from the public school system, leaving the worst behind. Viteritti presents a number of studies that disprove this; indeed, the prevalence of kids with serious problems in Catholic schools is obvious to anyone who has ever spent time in one. Still, the

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implications of the "skimming" argument are so appalling that even liberals often shrink from them. How many well-educated, articulate proponents of the "skimming" case send their kids—who are presumably at least at the level of "the best"—to the inner-city schools they are so committed to saving? Forcing our poorest kids to stay in failing schools they could and would rather leave is simply wrong, whatever the reasons.

Choice opponents often reply that we must "improve" the public schools, as though it were simply a matter of will. It is as though choice opponents have not learned the most obvious lesson from the Great Society—that smart people, armed with money, will not necessarily solve social problems, and may make them worse. Viteritti responds appropriately: "Unlike scientists in the medical profession, education researchers have never discovered the equivalent of a miracle drug to deal with education's most daunting maladies, and they probably never will." Moreover, by making this argument and rejecting choice, opponents of vouchers deny the mere possibility that creating a competitive alternative to the public school system will improve it.

The last line of opposition to choice concerns religion. Vouchers, opponents argue, are unconstitutional because they provide public money for people to attend religious schools—and that violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment. But it takes an ideologically ignited imagination to hold that providing vouchers by which poor parents can send their children to a public, private, or parochial school violates the First Amendment. Just about the only people who could accept this argument are militant secularists—who, to put it mildly, do not live in America's inner-cities. Viteritti patiently leads the reader through the tendentious labyrinth of Supreme Court religious jurisprudence to show how the secularist argument fails. He could have more easily posed the question: If ACLU lawyers think that vouchers violate the First Amendment, do they think that the G.I. Bill violates the First Amendment? Both provide government money for students to attend any school they want, religious or secular. Either they are both constitutional or they are both unconstitutional.

THE point is that the pro-voucher case is so morally convincing—and the growing consensus around it is so strong—that its eventual success or failure may help to settle a question larger than any single issue: Does genuine political influence reside in ideas? Those of us who are ideological deter-

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minists see world history as fundamentally shaped not by politics, economics, or geography but by ideas. As John Maynard Keynes wrote on the last page of his *General Theory*, "The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist."

Milton Friedman is not a defunct economist, but the fate of school vouchers over the next decade will test Keynes' supposition as accurately as any issue has done before. While the battle of ideas surrounding school vouchers is over, the political power of its opponents has prevented its widespread implementation. The opposition to vouchers remains primarily in the teachers unions and antidemocratic special-interest groups such as the ACLU. The special-interest groups can convince liberal judges to suspend voucher programs—but they have not had much need to do so because there have not been many voucher programs passed.

And the reason for that is the teachers unions, which do not want the state-sponsored monopoly that guarantees the jobs of its members to be threatened. The teachers unions have significant control over the Democratic Party—according to *Atlantic Monthly*, teachers unions sent more delegates to the 1996 Democratic Convention than did the state of California—but that (along with the ability to intimidate weak-minded Republicans) is all they have. It is a shame that the late leader of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker—a man of honor and principle—is remembered for saying that teachers unions will start looking out for children when they start paying union dues. Shanker cared deeply about education, but that was neither a job requirement nor a virtue shared by many of his union colleagues. Consequently, the battleground on education now is between power and ideas.

ANYONE who thinks that the education establishment has any intellectual strength should read *The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract*† by Theodore and Nancy Sizer. The Sizers have had long and distinguished careers in education. Mr. Sizer has been the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the headmaster of Phillips Acad-

† Beacon. 144 pp. $21.00.

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emy, and University Professor at Brown University. Mrs. Sizer has taught for more than two decades in public and private schools.

Yet it is difficult to say what exactly *The Students are Watching* is about. It is ostensibly about moral education, a subject to which liberals such as Robert Coles and Deborah Meier and conservatives such as James Q. Wilson and William Bennett have done justice. But this book is not actually about moral education—it is not about anything. The Sizers' sentences are to ideas what pump fakes in basketball are to shots, as they make quasi-arguments and ignore their most obvious implications. Examples abound: In their chapter, "Shoving," for instance, the Sizers appear to be defending, well, shoving. Teachers, they write, "live with the terrible truth that construction may require destruction, that violence may necessarily precede harmony, that what may be perceived as rudeness can be necessary to achieve something of special value." Columbine? Decatur?

The Sizers oppose "tracking" (the widespread practice of assigning students to classes based upon their aptitude or achievement in a subject) on the grounds that it "has been demonstrated to be harmful in research study after research study." This is a significant point, but they do not discuss these studies (or opposing ones) at all. As a former high-school teacher, I cannot imagine teaching a class of students whose intelligence and academic level are substantially divergent. So I was curious—what alternative do the Sizers present to grouping students in classes by their academic level? "A truly honest school is massively tracked, with every student at his or her most appropriate place at any moment—being asked insistently to be all that one can be."

ONE should not in light of this tracking example think *The Students Are Watching* a left-wing book on education. For that would imply that the book ties together arguments, scholarship, and experiences to form a systematic case, which readers could accept or reject, in whole or in part. *The Students are Watching* is not a book so much as a random collection of thoughts and observations that range from the obvious to the silly to the offensively reductionist. Consider:

- What is zero? If you can multiply by zero, is there ever nothing? The philosophy of mathematics arises easily from its simplest uses. It raises issues no less complex and important than those of justice and the nature of life.

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> • The thoughts and resultant actions of (say) a Polish-German day laborer working near Auschwitz in 1944, a person who sees the full trains come and the empty trains go, might be appreciably different from the conclusions about the Holocaust reached by an outraged American teenager sitting in an unthreatened high school classroom fifty years later. It will help the teenager to absorb complexity if he can reflect from the shoes of the laborer, not necessarily to agree but to empathize, to understand. In this Second World War moment there is powerful stuff: the particulars of a situation, in necessarily exquisite and painful detail. That stuff, if well and carefully considered, provides the perspective which is the heart of ultimately truly moral decisions. Educators call this *content*.

> • Challenge a student only a little and you will get small results. Challenge the same student appropriately but formally, and you will get much better results. The Army recruiter's cliché, "Be All That You Can Be," has within it a profound and useful message for school people.

After finishing this book, I could not help but wonder: Who is reading this, and why? Then I checked Amazon.com and found that *The Students Are Watching* is one of the most popular books among buyers at the Massachusetts Department of Education.

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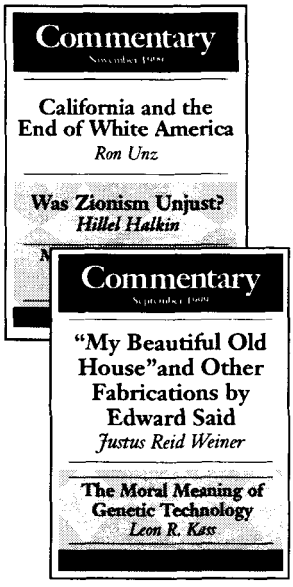

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